

PLUCK AND LUCK

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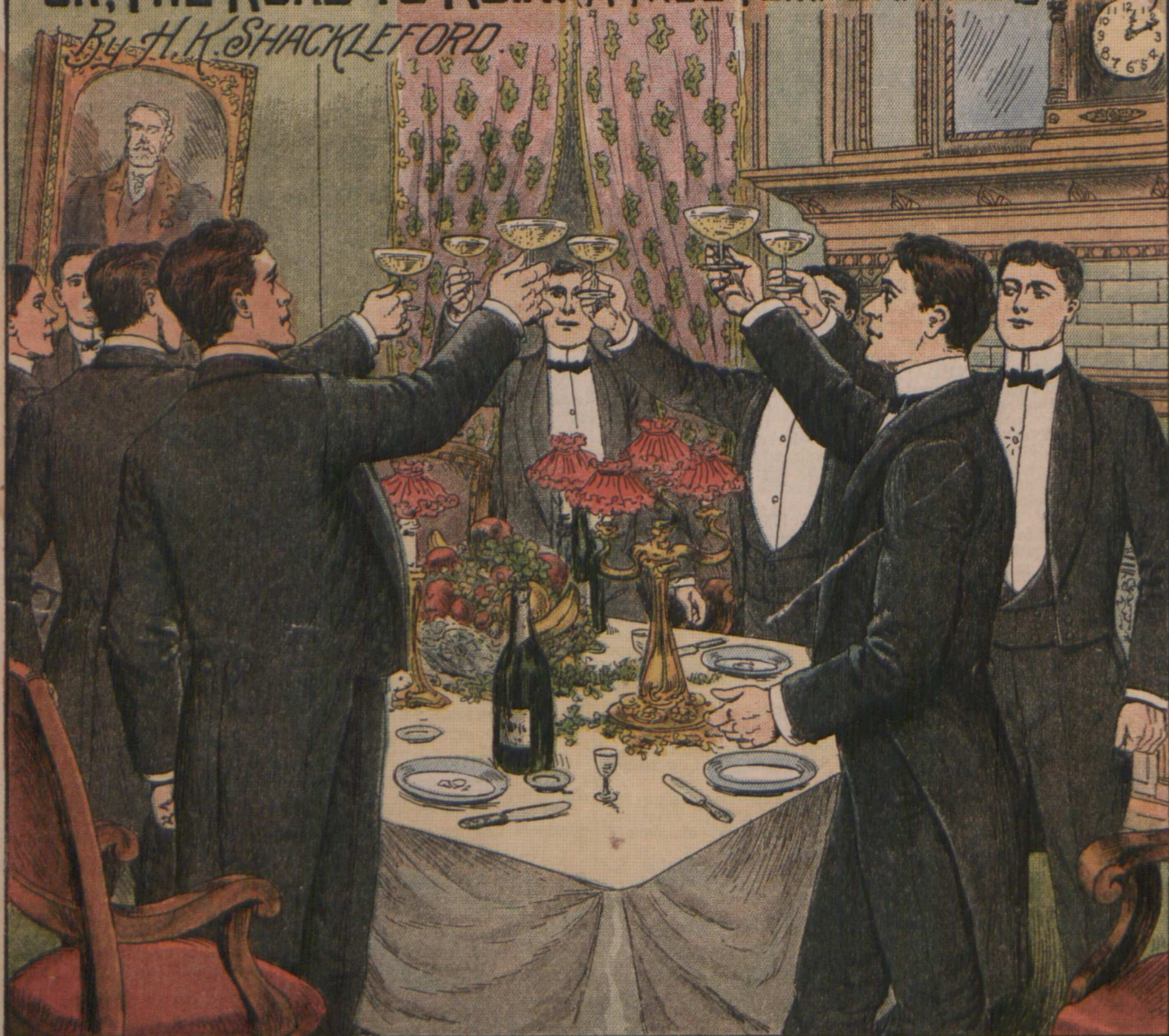
No. 306.

NEW YORK, APRIL 13, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THE DOWNWARD PATH; OR, THE ROAD TO RUIN. (A TRUE TEMPERANCE STORY)

By H. K. SHACKLEFORD.



After the feast came the wine. "Fill up, gentlemen" said Beckwith, "and we'll have a toast from Ludlow." "Here's to our next dinner one year hence," said Ludlow, holding his brimming glass above his head.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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1879.

CHAPTER I.

OUR HERO—BROTHER AND SISTER—THE EXCHANGE.

William Beckwith was a Boston boy.

His father was one of the many spokes that radiate from the "Hub" to the moral and intellectual rim which revolved around the "center of civilization."

The elder Beckwith was rich—a resident of Beacon Hill, and had spared neither time nor cash in giving his only son an education befitting his birth and future prospects in life.

At the time of the opening of our story, young Beckwith was just arrived to man's estate—twenty-two years of age.

He had just returned from Harvard College—that Mecca of intellectual Boston—with the highest honors, and his father, mother, and two sisters were proud of him.

To his mental training he had added a severe physical regimen—which gave him a muscular development of which he was justly proud.

With the oar he was accounted the best man in the crew, and stood second to none in all the other athletic sports of that renowned institution.

There was a certain dash and deviltry about him that frightened his maiden aunts and charmed his younger sister Alice.

"My dear boy," said his father, on the morning after his return from college, "what will you do with yourself, now that your school days are ended?"

"I will take a rest of a few weeks, and then adopt a profession—probably that of the law," he replied, in a thoughtful way.

"Ah, that pleases me," said his father, in a hearty, bluff sort of way. "I would rather see you a successful lawyer than anything else. I think you have the talent that will pull you through."

"I think so, too, father, and I am sure that I have application sufficient to develop it."

"No doubt of it—no doubt of it," responded the father, delightedly. "Just lay off and enjoy yourself for awhile, and then we'll make an engagement for you to enter and study under Quibble & Dryasdust, the best lawyers in Boston, and therefore the best in the world. If you need any money you will find money on deposit to your order in the Chelsea Bank. But, look here, my boy, in whatever way you enjoy yourself, let me beg you to remember that your father was never drunk in his life, and that he would consider himself disgraced in the sight of all Beacon Hill were his son to do so. Young men will drink wine occasionally, I know, but let your good judgment always tell you to stop when you have enough, so you may not lose the dignity of a Beckwith."

"Those are my sentiments exactly," replied the son, "for a man is not a responsible being when he is drunk. He is insane for the time being."

"Whew!" exclaimed Alice, the young, romping miss of seventeen, the pet of the family, "how is that for a temperance lecture, sister?"

Eleanor Beckwith, a tall, stately blonde of over eighteen or nineteen summers, smiled and looked pityingly on the stalwart young man.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Alice, "you'll have to renounce such old foggy notions, brother, if you travel with her."

"But I am not going to travel with my own sisters, you know," drawled William. "I prefer somebody else's sister, and——"

"Shocking!" gasped Eleanor, interrupting him; "if you have learned such slang at Harvard, there is no hope for the country. Private tutors must——"

"Private old bummers!" retorted William. "Harvard is the most high-toned institution of learning in the world. Come, Alice, let's go on a jamboree downtown."

"Jamboree!" exclaimed Eleanor, raising her hands in intellectual horror at the word.

"Yes, jamboree," repeated the imperturbable youth. "But I see you are not familiar with the ancient Greek. Alcibiades, in one of his eloquent orations, describes his pursuit and defeat of the enemy as a pleasant 'jamboree,' which is the first mention we have of the word."

Eleanor was overwhelmed—crushed—and made no reply.

"I say, Al," said William, as he and his romping young sister strolled down to the common, "Eleanor rides a high horse, doesn't she?"

"Yes; but don't you know?"

"Know what?"

"That Professor Bookeater is a worshiper at her shrine."

"Ah—ah! That accounts for it. Does she tumble to his racket?"

"Whew! I'd give just anything if you'd ask her that question in those precise words! She'd faint dead away!"

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Yes. If she utters a little sentimental nonsense he parses it to see if it's correct; and she conjugates his verbs, and—"

"Oh, Lord!" gasped William. "Let 'em marry and get out of their misery. But look here, Al, I've got something to tell you. You know Alphonse Ludlow, my room-mate?"

"No; I've never seen him."

"Oh, but you heard me speak of him."

"Yes, and you mentioned him in every letter you wrote home; but that doesn't make me know him, you know."

"Al, you're a brick—a regular female brick, and Ludlow will like you all over. He's dead in love with your picture already just as I am with his sister's. Well, he's coming down next Wednesday, with six others of our class to have our first regular annual dinner after our graduation."

"Then I will have a chance to see him, I suppose?"

"Yes; I have given you to him in exchange for his sister, Eugenie."

"Sold!" ejaculated Alice.

"Sold! What do you mean?"

"You have sold me for another girl!"

"Of course you will ratify the trade when you see him?"

"Of course I won't, you old Turk!" she replied, with some spirit. "Wives are not bought as they are in the East—at least not in Boston, the 'Hub' of——"

"Humbugs," interrupted William, laughing. "If you don't like Alphonse when you see him, just tip me the wink, and I'll declare the trade off, and then elope with Eugenie."

"Have you seen her?"

"No."

"Ha, ha, ha!" and the silvery laughter of the young girl, clear as a bell, sounded through the grand old forest trees of the common. "So you think she would ratify the sale, do you?"

"Of course she would. You see, I am a regular 'masher' among the girls."

"Whew! What a stunner you are!" and the mischievous miss eyed him with mock admiration.

She was a terrible tease, and at times made the house too uncomfortable for her elder sister.

"Pray, when did you say this lord and master you have selected for me will condescend to look upon his chattel?"

"He will be down early on Wednesday morning. We will have our dinner at the Parker House that evening."

"When will I be placed on exhibition to see if——"

"No, no. I will place him on exhibition for your inspection on Thursday evening, if you wish."

"Of course I wish it. I am a Boston girl, you know, and they never turn away when a man is around. I shall be happy to look at him on Thursday evening."

Thus brother and sister ran off for two hours, each having much to say to the other.

They returned to the house and found a letter from one

of the class, stating that they would be at the Parker House on the evening before the dinner.

"Good—we will have a run around town," said William, "and have some fun."

"Yes—your selfishness will stick out," said Alice. "Why don't you invite them up to the house and——"

"What! Invite seven wild young Harvard sprigs up to the house when they come down for a racket! Why, they'll tear down the house."

"That would just please me to death," said Alice.

"Couldn't think of it," and the athletic brother shook his head.

"Well, how would it do for me to dress up in boy's clothes and join you all in your——"

"By the beard of the prophet!" exclaimed her brother, "that would never do. No, by Allah!"

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW GUIDE TO BOSTON.

On the Thursday evening that the classmates of young Beckwith were to arrive at the Parker House in Boston, that young gentleman had two carriages in waiting for them at the depot.

The train arrived on time, and the greetings were cordial, as they were all intimate friends at college.

"I say, Beckwith!" cried young Arthur Warren, as they proceeded to the carriage, "I hope you haven't forgotten the way, old fellow."

"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such a thing?" replied Beckwith, in Oriental style of expression.

"Allah be praised!" exclaimed Alphonse Ludlow, "we are not forgotten in our youth, and in our old age will we be remembered."

At the hotel they were given rooms adjoining a private parlor, where bottles of sparkling champagne, and glasses were placed on a table at their disposal.

"Here's confusion to the dust in our throats!" said young Warren, holding up a brimming glass before the gaslight.

"Welcome the flood that drowns it out!" responded Beckwith, dropping into the capacious folds of an easy chair, "what shall we do for the evening?"

"Nothing," said Ludlow; "let the evening do for itself."

"Execrable!" cried several at once. "Fine him a bottle of the Widow Cliquot!"

"The widow is at your disposal, gentlemen. That was a good thing, of which I am not ashamed."

"Lost—lost!" moaned several. "What shall the monument be?"

"The skull of a Digger Indian," suggested Edward Halliday.

"You will have to be killed to get it," retorted Ludlow.

"Let it be a simple hole in the ground," suggested Beckwith, "as best suited for such a simpleton."

"Great punster!" exclaimed Joe Bradley. "There's another which is simply diabolical! Read the riot act and call out the militia!"

Beckwith quietly advanced to the table and drew a cork from the nearest bottle.

"Gentleman!" he cried, "that was exhausting—I am overcome as by a summer cloud. But I will never give up the ship—never—never—never—so help me dear Widow!" and raising a glass full of the sparkling beverage to his lips, drank it as though ready to perish with thirst.

They passed the evening together, leaving the hotel at a late hour to stroll about the city under the guidance of Beckwith.

They wanted to get a glimpse of a great city by gaslight, and young Beckwith was the one to show them around, as he knew every place of notoriety in the city.

They returned to the hotel at a very late hour, and Beckwith remained with them instead of going home.

Of course they slept late the next morning; but they were used to that, and so did not mind it.

After breakfast, Beckwith hired carriages and proceeded to show them the sacred places in the "Hub."

"This," he said, as they rolled leisurely through the Common, "is the famous 'Boston Common,' which you read of in your school history. An unsophisticated stranger once called it a pasture, and the indignant citizens demanded his life. He was hanged to the limbs of yonder elm. You see it has iron bands around it. It is a sacred tree now, and such is the veneration the citizens feel for it that you can scarcely enter a house in the city without seeing one or more glass cases containing some of its leaves."

The driver of the carriage opened his eyes in amazement, and glared at Beckwith and his companions as though doubtful of their sanity.

"He's guying yér, boss, he is," he whispered to one of the party; "don't yer swaller it."

"Drive to Faneuil Hall," ordered Beckwith, and the puzzled John whipped up his team, and soon had them at the "Cradle of Liberty."

"This is another sacred place in our sacred city," said Beckwith, as they entered the hall. "It was here that Hancock and Adams plotted treason against King George. They seduced the people into a rebellion against his authority, and at last succeeded in severing the union between Great Britain and America."

The others groaned.

"Can't we get a guide who knows something about these things, so we can learn something?" asked young Warren, a great wag, by the way.

"Come, let's go to Bunker Hill," said Beckwith, leading the way out of the hall. "I know your souls will melt with fervid patriotism there under the shadow of that sacred pile."

The carriage drove down and crossed over to Charlestown, and then up to the hill where stood the memorable monument.

"This," said Beckwith, as the eight young men sat in the two carriages and gazed up at the tall monument, "is where Warren fell."

"Did it hurt him?" Ludlow asked, innocently.

"Hurt him! He fell dead on the spot," exclaimed Beckwith. "He fell from the north side there, and struck——"

"He was shot by the British, sir," interrupted the driver, unable to keep silent any longer.

"That shows how much you know about sacred things," sneered Beckwith. "Don't you see the inscription there which says he 'fell'? It doesn't say anything about his being shot."

"But, yer know——"

"Yes, I know, but you don't," retorted Beckwith. "So keep your mouth shut, if you please. We hired you for your skill in driving, and not for your knowledge of sacred things. Drive us around to the South Church, if you know where that is."

"Yes, sir," said the subdued John, turning about and driving back to Boston, wondering what kind of a fare he had, anyway.

"This is called the old South Church," said Beckwith, as the carriages drew up in front of the ancient old church edifice, "because the southern fire-eaters used to come here and eat nigger babies, and——"

"By the sword of Bunker Hill!" cried the driver of the carriage in which Beckwith sat, leaping to the ground and

throwing off his coat, "if yer don't know no more'n that, I kin lick more sense inter yer! Git outen me kerridge, yer blasted son of a scuttle-fish! Your knowledge-box is so dry it makes the wheels creak to drive yer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the whole party, unable longer to restrain their hilarity. "Good for you, Jehu! Go for him! make a patriot out of him!"

The driver saw that he had been sold, and remounted his seat without another word, and drove them back to the hotel.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAD REVELRY DANCING BEFORE THE KING.

On the evening of the next day, at a late hour, the eight young Harvard graduates sat down to a sumptuous feast in one of the private parlors of the hotel.

It was a feast fit for a king, and the young men gave appreciative glances along the table as they seated themselves at their allotted places.

Young Beckwith occupied the seat of honor at the head of the table.

He rapped on the table with the handle of his knife.

"Gentlemen," he said, as silence prevailed, "we have met to partake of our first of a series of annual dinners, which are to be kept up during our natural lives. Let us enjoy it with that fellow feeling which makes all the world akin, so that each recurring occasion shall be looked for with blissful anticipations. Gentlemen, help yourselves."

"Amen!" responded young Ludlow, plunging his fork into a canvas-back duck which lay before him.

"Quack—quack—quack!" sounded through the room, with the peculiar rapidity of that fowl when frightened.

Ludlow sprang back with a mortified look on his face, amid the roar of his companions, and in a moment he saw that the ventriloquial powers of Joe Bradley had put the first joke on him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed with the rest, "that was well done, Joe—good joke on the duck!"

"Which duck?" queried Ludlow's right-hand neighbor, seriously.

"You!"

"Waiter," drawled Warren, "apply a wet towel to his head. It is not a dangerous attack, and will soon pass away."

"By the beard of the prophet!" exclaimed Beckwith, "conversation is good, but as my soul liveth this duck is better. He that hath ears to hear let him take the hint and neglect not the inner man."

The hint was sufficient, and the feast was thenceforward the idol of their worship, and a more devoted set of worshippers were never seen than they.

After the feast came the wine.

"Fill up, gentlemen," said Beckwith, "and we'll have a toast from Ludlow."

"Here's to our next dinner one year hence," said Ludlow, holding his brimming glass above his head. "May it be as good and enjoyable in all respects as this."

"Good—good—sensible at last!" cried Warren, as the entire party drank the toast.

"That toast reminds me of an idea I have," said Beckwith.

"Is it patented?" asked one.

"No—its perfect originality does away with the necessity of that," was the reply.

"Who originated it?"

"I did."

Several groaned dolefully, dismally.

"It is based upon a hypothesis," remarked Beckwith.

"What is that?" Warren asked.

"That you are all a set of asses."

"Your premises are correct. It is self-evident. We have listened to you five minutes under the impression that you had an original idea. Let us bray."

The table roared, and Beckwith bowed his acknowledgments to the felicitous Warren.

"That entitles you to a share in the idea," said Beckwith. "It is this: In the course of human events it may come to pass that some of us may become preachers or temperance men, as the case may be——"

"Heaven forbid!" fervently ejaculated Ludlow.

"By my soul, this thing shall never be!"

"Is thy servant a dog that——"

"Cease your noise till the idea is revealed!" commanded Beckwith.

"The revelation so far is revolting!" remarked Bradley.

"——and therefore," continued Beckwith, as if no interruptions had been made, "may desire to forego the pleasure of meeting each other on each recurring anniversary of this occasion."

"Allah forbid!" fervently ejaculated Alphonse Ludlow.

"Let us then pledge ourselves, that regardless of any changes that may come over the spirit of our dreams in the future, we will meet every year, laying aside religion, politics, social standing—everything, and as the band of friendly brothers that we are now, faithfully drink every toast given, in brimming glasses of wine, sing the old songs, smoke cigars, tell old and new stories, and in every way be the good fellows of to-day."

"Good—good!" cried several, in enthusiastic delight. "Good idea!"

"Here's to the new idea!" exclaimed Bradley, raising a brimming glass. "And may the brain that conceived it never soften under its tremendous effects."

The toast was drank with great enthusiasm, and the idea at once took possession of the entire party.

"Yes," said Warren. "Let's make the pledge now. As for my part, though I may be a bishop, I will lay aside the priestly robes and be, once a year, what I am to-day—ready to drink drunk any man in the crowd."

"So will I!" said Ludlow.

"And I—and I—and I!" chorused the others.

"Then fill your glasses, gentlemen!" said Beckwith.

The glasses were again filled.

"Here's to our mutual pledge—may each and every man keep it as men of honor."

The toast was drank with a hurrah.

Then followed songs and jests, each one singing one or more of the college songs of old Harvard.

But singing was dry work, as they soon found, and many a fresh bottle of wine had to be opened to moisten their throats.

Several began to show the effect of such liberal potations, and young Warren, with a reckless enthusiasm, on being called upon for a song, sprang upon the table and proceeded to sing:

"I will sing you a song of my love,
Of a love that is dearer than life;
She's an angel come down from above,
And has promised to be my own wife."

"Yes, I know her," interrupted one of the party. "She works in a shoe shop in Lynn. A nice angel she is."

"Dry up!" cried Warren.

"Close that music box," retorted Ludlow, "or we'll all die of disgust."

"Read the riot act."

"Give him another drink and roll him under the table!"

"Come, sonny, don't warble in the house. Climb a tree and be a bird."

"Give us the next verse."

Warren looked down at his jolly companions with a smiling complacency that was truly comical to behold, and waved his hand for silence.

"She's a rose from the garden of——"

"She's a big sunflower!" interrupted Bradley, at which they all laughed save Warren, who left the elevated position he held in a spasm of disgust.

"The sweet songster has descended from above," sighed Ludlow.

"Alas, how are the mighty fallen!" said one at the foot of the table.

"I say, fellows," cried Bradley, "let's (hic) elevate ourselves in the world."

"You can't do it," exclaimed Warren. "You're too low—you'll never rise."

Bradley leaped upon the table and extended his hand to Beckwith, pulling him up after him.

"Here's your throne," said another, handing up the big armchair in which Beckwith had sat during the feast.

They took the chair, and placing it in the center, seated Beckwith in it.

"Crown him!" cried Ludlow. "Crown him king of the Guzzlers!" and leaping up on the table he took an empty champagne bottle and stood it up on Beckwith's head.

"Fill up, fellows!" cried one, "let's drink the king's health!"

The glasses were again filled and emptied in quick succession.

Two of the revellers attempted to seize the same bottle, and a good-natured scuffle ensued in which four or five took a hand.

In less than three minutes two of them had their coats split up the back to the collar; another had a hat banged down over his eyes, and a fourth had a quart bottle shoved into each of his pockets; in fact, they looked as though they had been to a wake where the corpse had risen up and cleaned out the whole crowd.

"Come up higher, fellows!" cried Bradley, "an' lesh (hic) dance before the king!"

"Yes—dance (hic) 'fore the king!" and they all scrambled up on the table, to the destruction of half the dishes thereon, forming a ring around Beckwith, who kept his seat in the big armchair, by holding to each other's hands.

They then commenced to dance on the edge of the table, singing a favorite college song the while, raising pandemonium with tongues and heels.

Suddenly the door opened, and the proprietor of the hotel rushed into the room.

He was greatly excited.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, waving his arms wildly above his head, "you will ruin my house! You must stop this racket! I won't have it!"

"What means (hic) this intrusion upon our kingly (hic) privacy?" demanded Beckwith, with an assumption of dignity truly comical.

"Kingly privacy be hanged!" cried the indignant landlord. "I want this racket stopped or I'll send for the police!"

"Arrest that man!" said Beckwith, waving his hand loftily toward him. "Off with his head! So much for Buckingham!"

Four of the jolly revellers sprang from the table and darted toward him, with the intention of seizing him, but the nimble landlord turned and fled from the room, leaving his merry guests in undisputed possession.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SWELLED HEADS—THE CAUSTIC MAIDEN.

On being left alone by the landlord, the young revellers went on with the banquet as though nothing had occurred to mar their enjoyment.

But Joe Bradley was yet sober enough to have some discretion about him.

"I say, fellows," he said, "that poor fellow who caters to hungry lords like us has gone in search of brass buttons."

"No!" exclaimed another; "he wouldn't do that."

"A Boston—hic—king of a hashery will do anything," said Beckwith.

"Jes so—hic—jedge."

"Let's set the table again," proposed Bradley, "and sit like judges in council."

"Good—good—hic—sell 'im out!"

Three of the party were sober enough to enter fully into the spirit of the joke, and accordingly went to work to replace the dishes on the table, place the chairs in position, and seat the others at the table as though they were quietly discussing a meal.

They were no sooner seated at the table than the indignant landlord entered the room by means of a pass-key, followed by a half-dozen policemen.

"There they are!" cried the landlord. "Arrest them!"

The officers gazed at the orderly party seated around the table, and then at the fuming landlord:

The latter was as much surprised as the officers were.

"I don't see any reason why I should arrest them, sir," remarked the sergeant. "They are doing no harm that I can see."

The landlord glanced around the room and saw enough to make him swear a month, but not enough to cause the arrest of the party.

"Well," he exclaimed, "may I never die in Boston if this room wasn't turned upside down twenty minutes since, but now it seems quiet as a private parlor in Paradise."

Beckwith chuckled.

"The beer is on you, landlord."

"That's so," hiccoughed Warren.

"Gentlemen," said the landlord, turning to the officers, "come around when you are off duty and I'll set up the wine."

The sergeant and his men bowed, smiled, and departed from the room, followed by the landlord, who swore in choice Boston profanity.

"Now, fellows," said Bradley, "he's gone."

"Peace to his ashes—hic," said Beckwith, with mock gravity, "we ne'er shall look upon his like again!"

"Yes. There was none like him in all the earth. His wine was good," and Bradley filled another glass of the sparkling beverage and drank it off with as much gusto as at the first part of the feast.

Here Warren tried to sing another song.

"Get up—hic—on the table!" cried Ludlow.

Warren essayed to do so, but made a miserable failure.

The chair turned under him as he tried to step from it to the table, and he fell sprawling on the carpet, where all energy left him, and he rolled over to indulge in a drunken sleep.

"Les'h—hic—help 'im, boysh," said Ludlow, arising and staggering over to where Warren lay still as a log.

"Better let him be," suggested Beckwith.

Ludlow attempted to assist Warren to his feet, and in his efforts fell himself, never to arise again that night.

"Let 'em rest," said Bradley, who was now giving way to the soporific influence of the generous wine.

One by one they succumbed, until at last the best man rolled under the table.

At a late hour the servants entered the room and removed the unconscious young men to their bedrooms.

The next morning they woke up with heads on them as large as crockery crates.

"Oh, for a cotton press," groaned Ludlow, holding his head between his hands.

"You've a cotton head, eh?" asked Beckwith, who had been placed in the same room with him.

"It feels as big and heavy as a cotton bale," moaned Ludlow.

"You must have the swell head, then?" remarked Beckwith, whose head was calculated to stand the pressure without much inconvenience.

"No, it's got me, I think," said his comrade, with a sickly smile.

Beckwith pulled the bell rope, and in a few minutes a servant appeared.

"Did you ring, sir?"

"Yes; my friend is suffering with an enlargement of the head this morning, which nothing but a whisky cocktail will cure. Descend to the lower regions, and bring up a couple of cocktails, and there's a dollar for your trouble. Be lively, for the vacuum in my friend's cranium is in danger of——"

"May the infidel dog lick my boots if he isn't slandering me under the guise of friendship!" exclaimed Ludlow, as the waiter departed, rejoicing in the possession of the dollar bill which Beckwith slipped into his itching palm.

The waiter soon returned with the drinks, and the two young friends were happy.

Under the effects of the cocktail Ludlow said he could feel his head shrinking to its natural size; and in another half hour he was dressed, ready to accompany the whole party down to breakfast.

While sitting at the breakfast table, a note was slipped into Beckwith's hand by one of the waiters.

He glanced at it.

It was a bill for damages to property belonging to the hotel the night before.

"That's all right; tell him to put it in the bill," said Beckwith, turning to the waiter.

It was put in the bill, and pretty strong, too.

But he paid it without a word of dissent, and then the party left to ride through the city again.

They spent the day visiting places of interest, with which Boston abounds, and in the evening drove up to the elegant residence of the Beckwiths', where they were welcomed with a princely hospitality.

The romping, mischievous Alice Beckwith was as demure as any young maiden could possibly be when the young men were severally introduced.

She scarcely dared to raise her eyes to their faces, so demure and shy was she; but when Alphonse Ludlow was introduced she cast a furtive glance up at him, as she thought he squeezed her hand harder than did any of the others.

Ludlow was dead in love with her picture, and now that he had seen her in person, was more deeply smitten than ever.

He led her to a seat and conversed with her.

"I have heard your brother speak of you so often, Miss Beckwith," he said, "that I feel as though we were old acquaintances."

"And he has written so much about you in his letters," she replied, "that I know all about you."

"Well, I hope he wrote nothing bad about me?"

"How could he help it? You are all a bad set."

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" exclaimed the surprised young man. "Is it possible that our fair reputations have been ruined thus early in life?"

"Oh, no!" she laughingly replied. "College boys never have any reputations, you know. They merely get an education there, and make character afterward."

Ludlow was dumfounded.

Here was a young miss of seventeen talking to him as though he were a mere child and she a mature matron.

"Surely this girl must be wooed and won—not bought," he said to himself, as he gazed into her mischief-loving eyes.

"Miss Beckwith," he said, after a pause, "the wisdom of your observation surprises me. You will let me learn wisdom at your shrine, and——"

"Indeed I will not!" she interrupted, quickly. "I am not a public teacher. If your education is not complete you should return to Harvard, and——"

"Peccavi—mercy—have mercy!" he cried, laughingly. "You are too severe. Your brother had not told me of your caustic tongue, or I should not——"

"Caustic tongue, did you say, Mr. Ludlow?" she asked, again interrupting him. "But here comes my sister Eleanor. My sister, Mr. Ludlow—Mr. Ludlow, sister," and both acknowledged the introduction with the grace and ease born of good society.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER AND SON.

The Beckwith family made the visit of the young graduates an exceedingly pleasant one, short though it was.

They were anxious to visit the theater that evening, hence were compelled to leave the house at an early hour in the evening.

But before they left, the elder Beckwith made some remarks about young men forming their characters for life.

"You are now at a critical period in the history of your lives, young gentlemen," he said, "and it is very important that you should appreciate that fact. It takes years to build up and establish a solid character; yet in an hour it can all be undone. One glass too much of strong drink has been known not only to ruin individuals, but to bring about the downfall of an empire. Whatever you do, young gentlemen, never degrade yourselves by taking a glass too much of anything that can intoxicate."

William Beckwith gave a sly wink at his companions, who in turn wondered what the old gentleman would have thought of that banquet at the hotel the night before, could he have seen it when the revelry was at its height.

Alas! for human blindness!

Had the elder Beckwith preached and practiced total abstinence in the matter of liquor drinking, his heart would not have been wrung, as it was in later years, by the Rum Fiend's frightful work.

The gay party of young men went to the theater that night and enjoyed it to their hearts' content. But instead of going back to the Beckwith mansion on Beacon Hill, they returned to the hotel, where, in the same parlor they occupied the day before, they drank several bottles of wine.

"How is the governor on temperance, fellows?" young Beckwith asked, as he held a glass of wine in his hand.

"He is solid," said Bradley, "and I cordially endorse every word he said. I may not practice it, but I know that he told the truth, for all that."

"Confession is good for the soul, they say," remarked Warren, "and perhaps somebody wishes to ease his mind; but my conscience is perfectly quiet over last night's frolic."

"Well, it ought to be," retorted Ludlow, sarcastically, "for yours was the deadeast drunk I ever saw."

"No personalities, fellows," said Beckwith, "for we are all in the same boat as to last night's proclivities. It will always be a mystery as to how any of us got to bed. I know nothing about it myself."

"Nor I," said Warren.

"Nor I—nor I," repeated the others.

They retired at a late hour, much the worse for the wine they had imbibed.

But on the morrow they were all right again, and the visitors prepared to leave for their several homes.

By noon they were all gone, each pledging himself to meet with the others in one year from that time for another jolly time.

Being left alone, young William Beckwith slowly retraced his footsteps back to the elegant home of his parents, heartily wishing that some one of his classmates had remained with him.

But that was only a short-lived regret, for a young man of his social and financial standing in the sacred "Hub" is never without friends, or at a loss what to do.

Friends came around him by scores, and every kind of high-toned dissipation was indulged in.

One day the elder Beckwith came home with a cloud on his brow.

Some kind friend had informed him of his son William's fondness for champagne, and particularly about the dinner at the Parker House.

"William," he said, as the latter entered the library with him, "is it true that you got beastly drunk on the night of the dinner with your classmates at the Parker House?"

William was taken all aback by both the suddenness and directness of the question; he also saw that some officious friend had posted his father about the affair.

"I would hardly classify it as beastly," he replied, "but will acknowledge that we all drank too much champagne."

"My son, are you in the habit of getting drunk?" the father asked, a look of pain on his face.

"No, sir."

"But you are apt to drink too much sometimes?"

"No, sir; not more so than you or any other man who occasionally drinks a glass of wine."

"But I will never drink another glass if you will join me in the pledge," said his father, earnestly.

"I don't think there is any need of either of us doing that," replied William. "You are too old a man and too steady in your habits to change them now."

"I would do even more than that, my son, for your good. I must ask you to join me in signing the pledge not to drink any more wine, or anything that will intoxicate. Will you do it for my sake, as well as your own?"

Here was a dilemma.

What should he do?

His father was kind and indulgent in the highest degree, but also just. He held the purse strings, which was a potent argument in any debate.

"Yes, sir," said William, after a short pause, "I would not hesitate in such a small matter to oblige you."

"Thank you, my dear boy," said the father, heartily. "You don't know what a load you have lifted off my heart. But what will you say when your friends ask you to drink wine with them?"

"Why, I shall frankly tell them that you and I have agreed not to drink any more, that's all."

"Good—good! Give me your hand on that."

Father and son shook hands with affectionate cordiality, and passed out into the parlor together to listen to Alice's singing.

She had a sweet voice, and her singing was melody itself.

But while he was listening to the music, William Beckwith's thoughts were fixed on other things.

"By the beard of the prophet!" he muttered to himself, as he sat by the window and gazed up at the silent stars. "He must have suspected that I was a hard drinker. He seems very much put out about it, yet I'll wager that at my age he drank as much, if not more, than I do. Somebody must have told him an awful yarn about that Parker House dinner. I wonder if they told him of that pledge we all took that evening? If they did, he did wrong to insist on my taking another in violation of it. But what in thunderation shall I do when the fellows ask me to drink with them? Shall I really tell them that I have taken a pledge with my father not to drink any more! They would laugh at me all over town if I did. The fact is, I've got to play a double game, and drink all the same, though concealing it from him."

Alas! for the first false step.

William Beckwith saw the day when he bitterly repented that one step from the pathway his father had marked out for him.

Mr. Beckwith felt more proud than ever of his great, strong, handsome boy, and believing implicitly in his word, half the city of Boston could not make him believe that he would take a drink of wine.

But the very next day young Beckwith met with several gay companions, who insisted on his drinking with them.

At first he declined, but they made so many remarks, and asked so many impertinent questions, that to put a stop to them he drank the party drunk and yet managed to keep his balance.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT—"MY GOD, YOU'VE KILLED HIM!"—THE FLIGHT.

One false step usually leads to another, as one generally covers another, and young Beckwith was not an exception to the rule.

"It's no use," said William to himself one day, when thinking of the unmanly deception he was practicing on his father, "for a man to try to be a temperance man and keep up with society at the same time. They won't have it. A young man who won't drink wine with them is tabooed by the young men. Now, what would life be to me if my companions greeted me with a sneering remark, or some joke at my expense every time I hove in sight? Hang it all, I'm going to drink on the sly and let the old man think I'm a high-up teetotaler. If ignorance is bliss, why, let him be happy and I won't disturb him."

Thus he reasoned with himself, and tried to quiet his conscience.

But the same day he read in one of the daily papers that John Smith, while under the influence of liquor, murdered his wife, stabbed two of his children, and then attempted to take his own life.

"That fellow was a fool," he muttered to himself; "he drank too much altogether. Now I may drink too much sometimes, but I never yet lost my reckoning."

Thus matters went on, his indulgent father believing him to be strictly temperate in his habits.

One day he met with some old friends, and together they went to a place of resort in the outskirts of the city, where they spent several hours drinking and making merry.

William had a large sum of money in his possession which he had drawn from the bank for the purpose of buying a horse he had taken a fancy to, and, therefore, under the influence of wine, spent it with a lavish hand.

Like many old acquaintances when drinking together, young Beckwith and his companions began to take a great many liberties with each other, such as knocking off hats or crushing them down over their ears, snatching segars away, and many other such tricks.

Edwin Searle, one of his old friends, began a regular battle with him, during which he lost his temper, and knocked him down with his fist.

Edwin arose with an oath, and hurled a chair at him.

Beckwith dodged it and hurled another in return.

"You're a scoundrel!" cried young Searle.

"You're a red-headed beat!" cried Beckwith, and missiles of every description—beer glasses, spittoons, chairs—anything that came to hand, went flying back and forth.

Suddenly a heavy beer glass struck young Searle on the head, breaking into a thousand pieces, and the young man fell like a log to the floor.

"My God!" cried one of his companions, rushing up and bending over the prostrate young man. "You've killed him!"

"Yah!" said the German proprietor of the place, as he bent over and examined the wound, "dat was a good shot. He vas so dead as von herring!"

Almost paralyzed with horror at what he had done, William Beckwith stepped forward and looked down at his friend.

"My God!" he gasped, "he is dead, and I am his murderer!" and as he spoke, notwithstanding the great quantity of wine and beer he had been drinking, his face turned white as a sheet.

Great drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and his eyes glared as though he stood in the presence of some indefinable horror.

Suddenly he exclaimed:

"My people shall never see me again as a murderer! I will die first. Goodby, boys!" and rushing from the place he made all speed from the vicinity.

"Let him go!" said one of the party. "He didn't mean to kill him, and if he did, we don't want to see him hanged for it."

On leaving the place William made his way towards a railroad station, where, just as he entered it, a train—westward bound—rolled up, and he sprang aboard.

Having no ticket, he paid his way to New York to the conductor.

But on the way he was a prey to the most horrible reflections.

"Father was right," he said, bitterly. "A man under the influence of strong drink is insane. Had I been sober and in my right mind this thing would never have happened. Had I kept the pledge I made my father only a week ago, I would not now be a murderer flying for my life, henceforth to be a wandering vagabond on the face of the earth. Oh, wine—wine! This is your work. I was once as free from crime as the angels are free from sin, but in an evil moment I yielded to your wiles, and now I am lost to the world—a fugitive from justice, and a homeless wanderer!"

Arrived in the city, he hastened to buy a suit of clothing, such as would be suitable in the far west, whither he intended going at once. To these he had to add a hat, a brace of seven-shooters, bowie knife and rifle, boots, spurs, etc.; also a flowing false beard to more effectually disguise his identity.

"I will throw this away," he said, "as soon as my own beard grows, or I reach a spot in the far west where it will be safe to discard it."

That night he crossed the Hudson river and took the westward bound train on the Erie road, and as the train slowly moved out of the depot he shook like a leaf, burying his face in his hands and weeping like a child.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOSING GAME OF BLUFF.

The train sped on at the rate of forty miles an hour, and yet too slow for the impatient soul of William Beckwith.

Now that he was fairly launched into the sea of crime—as believed—he was in the frame of mind to be reckless in the extreme.

"Why should I seek to be a good man?" he asked himself in a bitter tone. "They would hang me all the same if they can catch me. I'd rather be the worst drunkard, thief, and murderer in all the wide west than to stand under the gallows with the noose around my neck, confess my deed, forgive everybody, and expressing the hope of meeting them in Heaven, suffer the sheriff to strangle me into eternity. Ugh! a thousand times no! Henceforth I will be the wild, reckless man my misfortune forces me to be."

The further west they went the less he saw of the refined surroundings that had been familiar to him from infancy.

At one of the stations he sought to get the champagne he had been used to drinking, but was laughed at for his weak taste.

"We keep something better than that, stranger," replied the burly barkeeper.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The real old mountain dew," the barkeeper answered.

"Give me a drink of it, then."

The bartender prepared a whisky straight for him, and he liked it so well that he ordered a bottle filled for use along the route.

"Ah!" he muttered, after taking a strong pull at the bottle, "this is good medicine. It goes right to the spot, and cures any little temperance aches that may creep into one's system. It may be the road to ruin, but it tastes good, and cheers a man up when he is ready to faint."

When he reached Omaha, he stopped over one day to look around, to see where was the best place in the great west for him.

He went around among the bar-rooms and saw there many rough specimens of the western bully, several of whom hailed him with the well-known familiarity of the border pioneers.

"Halloo, stranger!" cried one, as he strolled into a saloon, "what's yer game?"

Not being familiar with the slang so peculiar to the west, he stopped and looked at the man.

He was a tall, rawboned specimen, whose bushy beard, unkempt hair, dirty hands, patched coat and pants, boots, and inevitable spurs, denoted the whisky guzzling adventurer and bully.

Beckwith saw that the man was about half drunk, armed, and ready to pick a quarrel with somebody on the slightest pretext, so he replied good-naturedly:

"My game is liquor for the crowd—have a drink, sir—everybody!"

"That's my hand!" cried several, making a rush toward the bar.

"Stop!" cried the unkempt bully, glaring fiercely at the crowd, who slunk back as if from an uncaged Bengal tiger, to the great astonishment of Beckwith.

"This is my game," the bully added, "an' I guess as how he'll make up to the Rocky Mountain Screamer afore he does to any of your sort. Did yer say liquor, stranger?"

"Yes," replied William, disgusted at the style of the bully, as well as the cowardice of the others, "for the crowd."

"The crowd will drink when I give the word, stranger," replied the bully, pacing a hand on his revolver.

"What's the matter? Isn't this a free country? Can't a man drink without asking permission of——"

"Stranger," said the Screamer, "yer don't know me, I reckon. I'm the Rocky Mountain Screamer, the best man that ever cast a bullet in these parts."

"Let's hear you scream," said Beckwith, disgusted beyond expression at the bully's presumption.

"Great grizzlies!" yelled the Screamer, drawing his revolver, "the man is tired of life, an' wants ter be wiped out!"

Beckwith deliberately walked up to the bully and planted a blow between the eyes that sent him rolling over and over on the floor, to the unbounded astonishment of the crowd, who seemed to think he was a doomed man.

Before the bully could rise to his feet Beckwith disarmed him, and then proceeded to administer a good thrashing.

"Oh, you're the Rocky Mountain Screamer, are you!" he exclaimed, slapping his face like a mother would her unruly son's. "Who goes about on the shoot, bullying everybody whom you think is afraid of you! Scream now, or, by the beard of the Prophet I'll thrash you like a dog."

The cowardly wretch attempted to resist, but he was knocked down by a blow from Beckwith's fist.

"Get up now, and scream for us!" cried his assailant, "or I'll kick you across the river!"

The bully opened his mouth, and screamed at the top of his voice.

"Very good—very good, indeed," said Beckwith. "But look here, my screecher, don't you go bullying it around where I am again, or I'll pour shot down your throat, and throw you in a mud hole. I'll bet a dollar you never shot at a man in your life when he had a chance to fire back at you. Yet you had all those fellows there trembling in their boots just now. Here, take your pistols and bowie, step out there ten paces, and let's try seven shots each. I don't believe you would dare face a dog if he had a reasonable show to get at you."

Drawing his own revolver, Beckwith covered the wretch with it as he took up his own weapons.

"See hyer, stranger," said the cowed bully, "I ain't got nothin' agin yer. I was runnin' a bluff, an' drunk."

"Just what I thought," replied Beckwith, sneeringly. "Now go, and if you ever blow about the Rocky Mountain Screamer, I'll make you scream loud enough to wake up all the sleepers in San Francisco."

The Screamer turned and walked out of the saloon, followed by a cheer that told him in plain language his power was broken forever in Omaha.

"Give us yer flipper, stranger," cried one of the bystanders, rushing forward, and grasping Beckwith's hand. "You've licked the worst desperado on the river!"

"I don't think him very dangerous," quietly remarked Beckwith.

"He was always on the shoot, stranger, he was, and he laid out some of the boys down on the Arkansaw. But I kinder reckon as how you've done for him, stranger. I say, stranger, it's my treat. Come up, fellows!"

No Mountain Screamer being in the way now, they made a rush for the bar, and for several minutes nothing but clinking glasses was heard, and the expressions of wonder at the coolness and daring of the stranger in braving the wrath of the Screamer.

"What's yer handle, stranger?" one asked, as he held his glass in his hand.

"Whisky Bill," replied Beckwith, at random, not knowing what other to give under the circumstances.

"Hurrah for Whisky Bill, the whitest man in the west!"

"Hurrah—hurrah!" yelled the crowd, rushing forward to take him by the hand. "Give us yer hand and count me in ter back yer up ag'in a thousand screamers!"

And these were the men who, ten minutes before, were

cowering like whipped spaniels, beneath the terrible frown of the Rocky Mountain Screamer.

Picking out one who seemed to be quite intelligent, Bill beckoned him aside and asked:

"Do you live in these parts?"

"No. I live out in Virginia city when I'm ter home," replied the man, "but my pard went back on me, sloped with my dust, and I'm lookin' for him. We're goin' ter have a funeral when we meet, stranger."

"Do you think you will find him here?"

"Don't know, stranger; guess he'll make for the states, an' ef he does he'll pass through hyer, an' I'll get him."

"Well, I'm going out to Virginia City, or somewhere else out there," said Bill, "and I'd like to have you go with me."

"Thank yer, stranger," said the man. "But I'm cleaned out of dust, an' ain't got no money."

"I've enough for both."

The man grasped his hand and shook it cordially.

"Pard," he said, "I'm yer mule, an' jest yer say 'kick,' an' out goes my heels."

"All right. It's a bargain. Now give me your name?"

"Buck Halliday."

"Well, Buck—when will you be ready to start?"

"Any time—right now, if yer say the word."

"Well, we'll take the train to-night," and the two men turned and sauntered off up the street, followed by a score of men who pointed to Whisky Bill as the man who had just licked the Rocky Mountain Screamer, the desperado.

CHAPTER VIII.

WESTWARD HO!

To his surprise, Whisky Bill found himself suddenly famous in the city of Omaha, by reason of his daring chastisement of the bully and desperado.

In less than two hours every liquor saloon in the town had heard of the fight, and Whisky Bill's credit was good for as much liquor as he and his friends could drink.

The most extravagant stories were set afloat about him.

"He's the best Indian fighter in the west," said an old grizzly, in one of the saloons down on the river. "Bill an' me hez had many a scrimmage with the red devils. I'd like ter see him. Whar is he, eh? Don't nobody know?"

"He keeps a private cemetery," said another, who professed to have known him for months, "and he came near planting me there once, he did, but he saw his mistake just in time to keep from going there with me. Bill is on the shoot, he is, and the whitest man in the diggings. Set 'em up agin, Jim."

Thus it went from mouth to mouth, and wonderful tales were told by men who professed to have been Whisky Bill's partners in many a perilous scrape.

There were quite a number of men in from the mines who knew Buck Halliday, and the news went around that Buck and Whisky Bill were traveling together.

"Halloo, Buck, my boy!" cried an old miner who simply knew Buck by sight. "Slash me if I aren't glad ter see yer!" and rushing up to the young red-shirted miner, he grasped his hand in true western style. "Have a drink with me, old fellow—hyer, Jake, be lively an' hand out yer best pizen ter Buck an' me an' his pard."

The barkeeper set out the inevitable decanter and glasses.

"Yer recollect me, Buck—Joe Hurd, what was down the hill under yer claim last fall," continued the imperturbable Joe, on seeing that Buck was vainly trying to locate him.

"Oh, yes," said Buck. "I didn't know you at first. This is Whisky Bill."

"Why, Bill!" exclaimed Joe, grasping our hero's hand, and shaking as though trying to raise water from a dry well, "hanged if I ain't tarnation glad to see yer! Heered of yer lots er times, but never seed yer afore. Have a drink, eh?"

Buck and Bill indicated their willingness to again indulge in whisky straight, and the three drank each other's health in brimming glasses of the fiery stuff.

That evening Bill and Buck went to the westward bound train, followed by a rousing cheer for the conqueror of the Rocky Mountain Screamer.

Buck Halliday was a rough diamond—a warm, true-hearted fellow, brave and generous to a fault, but one who never sought a difficulty with any man for the sake of gaining cheap notoriety.

He was just such a man as Bill wanted—one he could rely upon in any emergency.

Buck was pleased with Bill, and called him "pard" in their ordinary conversation.

"Pard," he said, the next day, as the train went bowling along over a lovely prairie, "you're too much on the shoot."

"Never shot a man in my life, Buck," replied Bill.

Buck gave a low whistle of astonishment.

"You see, I know something about human nature," said Bill. "No brave man was ever known to whoop and yell and blow about himself. All such are cowards, and a little bluff will cool 'em down."

"But some of 'em shoot," persisted Buck, shaking his head.

"Yes, so they do, when they can't help it, or when they get the drop on a man."

Just then a big bully entered the car, his well-worn slouch hat careening over on his right ear, a brace of pistols around his waist in a belt, pants in his boots, and huge, jingling spurs.

He was about half seas over, and in just the frame of mind to pick up a quarrel with anybody.

"That's Tom Bowles," whispered Buck to Whisky Bill; "a regular screamer, and on the shoot, too."

Just then Bowles espied Buck, and recognized him.

"Halloo, Buck," he cried, in a rough, harsh tone of voice, as he advanced toward him. "Goin' back, eh?"

"Yes; got to dig again—pard sloped with my dust," was the sententious reply.

"You don't say!"

"Yes, waited around Omaha a week, but didn't see him."

During this speech Tom Bowles looked at Whisky Bill, as though he half expected him to get up and offer him his seat alongside of Buck Halliday.

But Bill sat still, as though no such important personage as Tom Bowles lived.

"I say, you!" he growled, laying a heavy hand on Bill's shoulder, "git up an' give me this seat."

"Beg your pardon, sir," replied Bill, coolly, "but I believe I paid for this seat."

Bowles quietly drew his pistol, cocked it, pointed it at Bill's head, hissing the single word:

"Git!"

Like a flash of lightning Bill knocked up the pistol, dealt him a blow in the stomach that doubled him up like a jack-knife, and sent him rolling on the floor of the car between the long row of seats.

CHAPTER IX.

THE AVENGER.

A fight in a passenger car on the Union Pacific road was not an unusual occurrence, but they never failed to create an excitement among the passengers on the car.

There were some half a dozen well-dressed ladies in the same coach with our hero, so in order to prevent any shooting he seized Bowles' two revolvers and handed them to Buck Halliday.

"Hold on to them, Buck," he said coolly, "till I can teach him a lesson."

Bowles arose, feeling very sick at the stomach, from the blow in that region which Bill had given him.

But there was murder in his eyes as he reached for his revolvers.

"Take your knife, my bully," said Whisky Bill, "as it wouldn't do, you know, to shoot in a car where ladies are."

Bowles drew his knife, but glared suspiciously at the athletic young tartar he had unearthed.

"Shall we have it out right here?" Whisky Bill asked, drawing out his own bright bowie, "or will you wait till we get to the next station where we can settle it without alarming the women?"

"Whar's my weepin's?" demanded Bowles.

"I have them," said Bill. "You must fight for them if you get them."

"I'm robbed!" yelled the bully.

"You're a liar and a coward!" retorted Bill, "and if you don't acknowledge it I'll rip you up right here, you white-livered son of a sheep!" and with that Bill started toward him with his bowie in position.

Bowles retreated to the end of the car, cursing and swearing like a pirate.

"Get out of this car!" cried Bill, "and if you enter it again between here and San Francisco, I'll blow your cowardly head off for you."

Bowles left the car, vowing to be avenged on him for the insult.

"Who is it? Who is the young rooster?" was asked by everybody in the car.

"Whisky Bill," replied Buck Halliday, in a whisper, "the whitest man between the two oceans."

Everybody tendered their congratulations, and one young lady, dressed in deep mourning, went up to him, saying, as she extended her hand:

"That man slew my brother, sir, and I am so glad you did what was right just now."

"My God!" exclaimed Whisky Bill, as he gazed at the pallid face of the young lady, "do you say that he killed your brother?"

"Yes, sir; a year ago."

"If you will stop at the next station to witness it, I will be your champion, and avenge your brother!"

She looked at him with astonishment.

"I mean what I say, miss," he added. "I am bad enough myself, yet good enough to punish a man like him."

She was a girl of terrible hate.

She hated Bowles with a hatred that would annihilate him if she could will it so to happen.

"I will stop over, sir," she said, in a low tone, full of concentrated hate.

The news spread through the train, creating the most intense excitement.

Bowles swore he would not fight; but the passengers vowed they'd stop over and see what came of it.

"I won't fight him!" said Bowles, completely sobered by the situation.

"Yes, he will," said Whisky Bill, when told of what Bowles had said. "If he doesn't fight, I'll deliberately kill him. Such chaps as he has been running loose long enough in these parts."

Of course these threats were carried back to Bowles, and the bully trembled like a leaf.

"Get me my weepins," he asked of one of his friends, imploringly.

None of them dared to incur the anger of the man who was now the lion of the hour, so he remained without his "weepins."

He then tried to borrow a brace of revolvers, in the hope of being able to get the drop on Whisky Bill as he was getting off the cars; but no man would part with his weapons.

Bowles was getting desperate.

The whistle blew for the next station, and the excited passengers began to prepare to get off and wait for the next train.

Suddenly Bowles sprang up from his seat, rushed to the door, threw it open, and plunged off the platform while the train was speeding along forty miles an hour.

CHAPTER X.

RED SHIRTS AND GOOD FELLOWSHIP.

The news of Bowles' leap from the train soon spread through the cars, and the greatest excitement was the consequence.

Nearly everybody congratulated Whisky Bill on his victory over the bully.

"I am very sorry he didn't wait and face the music," said he. "Not that I had anything against him, but for the young lady's sake whose brother he killed."

"I am sure I am much obliged to you, sir," said the young lady, extending her ungloved hand toward him. "But if you ever do meet him and have occasion to renew your quarrel with him, please remember my poor brother."

"My dear young lady!" exclaimed Whisky Bill, grasping her hand in both his, "if ever I meet him he shall fight me solely on your account, for that is the only quarrel I have with him."

"I am sorry to have been the cause of——"

"No—no, it's the duty of every man to take up the quarrel of woman and fight it out for her," said Whisky Bill, interrupting her.

"Good—good!" cried Buck Halliday. "That's the talk, pard."

The young lady then gave her name as Sarah Taggart, living with her widowed mother in Virginia City.

"Why, that's where I'm going!" exclaimed Bill.

"I'm glad to hear it," and the young lady went back to her seat, leaving Whisky Bill surrounded by nearly a score of rough characters peculiar to that section of country.

"I say, pard," said a rough, red-shirted, heavy bearded man, drawing a black quart bottle out of a capacious pocket, "yer don't go back on yer name, do you?"

"Well, no," replied Bill, smiling. "but my namesake goes back on me sometimes."

"Trips yer up, eh?"

"Yes."

"Let her trip. Hyar, drive a nail in yer coffin," and red shirt passed the bottle over to him.

Whisky Bill took it, turned the bottom up toward the roof of the car, and took a long "pull" at it.

"It's my namesake," he said, handing the half-emptied bottle back, "and we are great friends."

"By the great grizzlies, I believe yer, pard!" exclaimed red-shirt. "Hyar goes for 'tother half an' a big drunk."

He emptied the bottle, and the rough-visaged passengers were in no wise astonished to see a quart of whisky disappear in two drinks.

Such drinking was common out west, where the whisky is

often watered—like mining stocks—and six "quart" bottles are required to hold a gallon.

Of course, Whisky Bill was a favorite with everybody on board the train, as is any man in that section who is regarded as "on the shoot."

They didn't know anything about his antecedents; didn't want to know any more than what they had seen in his encounter with Bowles.

At the next station many were in favor of getting off and instituting a hunt for Bowles, and finding him, force him to fight.

Whisky Bill was ripe for anything, having drank whisky enough to make him reckless of consequences.

"No, Bill," said Buck Halliday, "we must go on to Virginia City. We'll meet him in the diggings somewhere, and then you can go for him."

He wanted to get off, anyhow.

Miss Taggart, seeing how matters were going—that her champion was getting the worse for the liquor he had taken, persuaded him to forego the pleasure of chastising Bowles until he met him again.

He yielded, and the next moment the iron steed went snorting and shrieking toward the setting sun.

At every station along the road the passengers refilled their flasks and bottles, and thus kept well under the influence of liquor to a greater or less extent.

Whisky Bill was not of a naturally quarrelsome disposition, but he was quick to resent any insult of whatever nature.

At the third station from where Bowles leaped from the train a man got on board, who presented the appearance of a walking arsenal.

He carried three revolvers and two bowies in his belt—wore huge cavalry boots, hair and beard unkempt, red shirt, and buckskin pants.

He had a harsh, coarse voice, and a countenance that would have confirmed suspicion and secured conviction on any charge in any civilized court of justice.

On entering the car he dropped into a seat belonging to a young commercial traveler, who had left his baggage in it while he indulged in a cigar in the smoking-car.

He kicked the baggage off the seat and made himself comfortable, glaring around at the passengers with an air that plainly said:

"Behold me and tremble!"

He seemed to be slightly under the influence of liquor, but was in no wise drunk.

But he seemed somewhat disappointed that nobody paid court to him as a recognized man of importance—one who had killed his man and stood ready to do so some more on the slightest provocation.

"That man is an arrant coward, Buck," whispered Whisky Bill to his companion. "Who is he?"

"Don't know," replied Buck, eying him sharply. "Never saw or heard of him before."

"He has no right to that seat."

"He has a right to half of it, as each seat holds two."

"Yes, but he's going to appropriate the whole of it."

"Well, let him alone and see what he'll do."

"I'm sick of such swaggering bullies," remarked Bill, "and feel like throwing him out of the window."

"See hyar, pard, ef you go to picking up a muss with every bully in the west you'll have about a dozen fights on hand every day. Just let 'em alone. They ain't worth yer time an' 'twill do yer no good."

This was sound advice, but Whisky Bill just then carried too much whisky in him to give any heed to it.

He glanced over at the bully as though quite anxious to cultivate an acquaintance with him.

Just then the young commercial traveler returned to his

seat and was somewhat taken aback at finding his baggage on the floor, and a burly walking arsenal occupying his seat.

He picked up his baggage and placed it carefully between the seats, and then attempted to seat himself by the side of the bully.

"Hyar! Git!" growled the arsenal, giving the young man a kick that sent him out into the aisle, with pain and terror plainly depicted on his face.

"Here, sir," said Whisky Bill, springing to his feet. "You can have my seat, sir!" and taking the young man by the arm, forced him down into the seat he had just vacated by the side of Buck Halliday.

Every eye in the car was centered on him as he walked over to the bully and planted himself into the seat by his side.

"Bounce! Git!" growled the shaggy arsenal, raising his foot and kicking Whisky Bill on the knee.

"Yes; bounce out of this!" cried Bill, springing up and raining a half dozen blows with his clenched fists on the man's face, knocking him into a cocked hat in just five seconds.

"Great hewgags!" cried the astonished bully, blood streaming from his broken nose and split cheeks. "You want me ter kill yer! I haven't killed a man in three days. Yer brought it on yerself like a blasted fool!"

He attempted to draw a revolver, but Whisky Bill dealt him several tremendous blows which caused him to drop insensible to the floor between the seats.

"If you haven't got enough," said Bill, "call on me when you get up. I charge nothing for my medicine."

He then quietly sat down on the seat and rested his feet on the prostrate bully, to the very great delight of the passengers, who rejoiced at the overthrow of all such pests as this man had shown himself to be.

"Just keep quiet, gentlemen," he said, as the passengers crowded around the seat. "Take your seats, and I'll show you how to tame these wild animals of the west."

Without another word every man and woman seated themselves to await developments, watching this young man, whose skill and strength would have won him the belt in any prize ring, in his struggle with the unknown bully.

In about ten minutes the bully began to recover consciousness, and soon became aware of his degradation.

"Furies!" he yelled, scrambling to his feet and drawing a revolver.

Whisky Bill sat unmoved in his seat, with a cocked revolver in his right hand, pointed directly at the bully's breast.

The sight of that revolver caused the rascal's hands to drop nervelessly to his sides, and he gasped:

"Yer've got the drop on me, stranger!"

CHAPTER XI.

CATCHING A BULLY.

"I rather think I have," replied Whisky Bill, "and if you don't say your catechism like a good boy, I'll drop you, too!"

"I—I—don't know no catechism," stammered the bully.

"I'll teach you one," said Bill. "Hold up your hands."

Up went a pair of very dirty hands, reaching up against the roof of the car.

"You don't wash your hands often?"

Bully made no reply.

"You'll find it healthy to answer any observation I may see proper to make," remarked Whisky Bill. "When did you wash your hands last?"

"Don't know."

"Not since you buried your last victim, eh?"

"No," growled the bully.

Buck Halliday laughed outright, followed by nearly all the others in the car.

Bully looked daggers at him, but Buck remarked:

"I don't tremble, pard—yer know how it is yerself."

"Now, turn around there and tell that young man whom you kicked out of his seat that you are sorry you acted like such a cowardly——"

"No—I—I ain't a coward!" cried the man.

"Yes, you are—an out and out coward, who wouldn't face a sheep unless his horns were sawed off. Tell him so."

The bully turned and repeated Whisky Bill's very words in the presence of the entire coach full of passengers.

Just then the whistle blew for the next station.

"You get off at the next station," said Bill, "and, mind you, wash your face and hands before you get on another train on this road. I'll pound you to a jelly and feed you to the coyotes if I ever meet you with such dirty hands again. Comb your hair, too; understand!"

The passengers roared, and the conquered bully had not a word to say in reply.

The train slowed up and finally stopped at the station, where Bill marched the unknown bully out on the platform and left him there.

"Good-by, pard!" cried Whisky Bill, as the train moved off, leaving the blood-stained wretch on the platform of the little station.

The bully drew a revolver and fired savagely at the train, filling the air with curses, as each revolution of the car wheels made it safer for him to do so.

It was afterwards ascertained that he told them at the station that nine men had attacked him on the train—that he had killed five and wounded the others—that he had left the train to get out of paying the burial expenses of so many men.

Of course, he made every one tremble in and about the station until the next train came along, which he boarded and continued his journey toward the setting sun.

In due time our hero reached Virginia City, which, at the time of which we write, contained adventurers from every portion of the globe in her population, all eager to make fortunes, either by digging for the precious metals, or by some other lucky streak of fortune.

Every man was armed to the teeth, carrying bowies and revolvers in belts plainly exposed to view, ready to be drawn and used on the slightest provocation.

Besides this characteristic every man was a drinker to a greater or less extent, hence no man could make any headway in the matter of reforming himself in that respect.

Buck Halliday knew quite a number in the diggings, and lost no time in letting his acquaintances know that Whisky Bill, his partner, was the best man in the mines.

The second day of his stay in the city saw Whisky Bill drunk as a lord, and very pugnacious.

Buck could do nothing with him, and dreading to incur his displeasure, he went away from him, leaving him to take care of himself.

In less than an hour he picked up a fight with an Irishman, who was but very little under the "influence."

The result was that the sober man was the better of the two, and, for the first time in his life, Whisky Bill got an unmerciful drubbing.

"Whoop—hooray!" yelled the Hibernian. "Ould Killarney foriver."

"I say, Buck," called out an old miner on the other side of the town, "what kind of a fish story was it yer were givin' us about that ere pard of yours?"

"I said he was the best man in the mines," replied Buck.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the old miner. "That Irishman down at Sam McCormick's has just beaten him to a jelly."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, he gave him the deuce!" chuckled the old miner, placing a huge quid of tobacco in his mouth, "an' yer'd better look arter him afore Jim Bowles finds him. That 'ere Irishman hasn't left much life in him I reckon."

"Jim Bowles," exclaimed Buck, in surprise. "When did he get here?"

"Last night," was the reply.

Buck knew that if Bowles could catch Whisky Bill as drunk as he was then he would pick a quarrel with him and kill him, so he hastened to hunt him up and take care of him.

Just as he entered Sam McCormick's saloon he saw Jim Bowles hastening in the same direction.

Whisky Bill was found lying on a wooden bench, bleeding at the nose, with eyes badly bunged, and his head and face terribly bruised.

"Whar is he?" cried Bowles, as he swaggered into the saloon. "Show me the cowardly whelp, and I'll wipe up the floor with him!"

Somebody had just told him that Whisky Bill was dead drunk, and had just been badly beaten by McCormick's Irishman.

"Here he is," said Buck, drawing his seven-shooter, "and I'll perforate the coward that touches him while he is down!"

"Let me get at him an' he'll never get up again!" cried Bowles, making great demonstrations to get at him, but was held back by others, who saw the injustice of the thing.

"Turn him loose, men!" cried Buck, "and I'll give him all the fight he wants."

They turned him loose, and the two men stood facing each other with revolvers in their hands.

"Buck," said Bowles, "I ain't got nothin' agin yer, an' I don't want ter hurt yer."

"Don't yer try it then, Jim," said Buck, quietly. "Wait till Bill is on his pins again, an' he'll give yer all the fight you want. If you are spoiling for a fight an' can't wait, why, I'm yer man."

"No, no, Buck," said Bowles. "I'll wait till he gits sober. Don't let him have any more liquor till I see him. I'm jes' spilin' ter get at him, pard."

Bowles left the saloon and made haste to get out into the diggings, so as to avoid Whisky Bill, knowing that Buck would report the facts to him as soon as he sobered sufficiently to understand what was said to him.

Buck took care of him until he slept off the liquor he had taken, and then found he had need of a physician.

CHAPTER XII.

BLACK EYES.

After removing him to their temporary quarters Buck Halliday at once called in a physician, who, after carefully examining his patient, pronounced it a case of fisticuffs and whisky.

"He'll be all right to-morrow," said the doctor, "but he'll carry his eyes in mourning for a couple of weeks."

"Is it no worse than that, doctor?" Buck asked, with considerable anxiety.

"No—that's all."

"Then there'll be several pairs of black eyes in this town before the week is out," said Buck, with an emphasis that startled the doctor.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Why, this is the best man in the diggings," replied Buck, "but they pitched into him when he was dead drunk and beat him. He'll clean 'em out when he gits sober, or I'll go back on him."

The doctor smiled.

It was five to ten dollars in his pocket every time he was called to dress a wound or bruise, so the more fights the more business for him.

Buck was right.

On waking up the next morning, Whisky Bill didn't know himself as he looked in the little mirror that hung against the wall of his room.

Both eyes were beautifully blacked; several bumps on his head showed where blows had been planted; and many black and blue spots on his body were the results of sundry kicks administered when he was too drunk to resist.

"Humph!" he grunted, as he gazed upon his reflection in the mirror. "They wouldn't know me at home now, I guess. My classmates wouldn't recognize me. This all comes from liquor drinking. Had I heeded the advice of my indulgent father and let liquor alone, I would have still been in Boston, with friends and relatives, respected by everybody. But now I am a fugitive from justice, and a drunken vagabond, kicked and cuffed about, like a tramp. This is some of the rum fiend's frightful work."

"How do you like your looks, pard?" asked Buck Halliday, coming into the room while Bill was indulging in bitter reflections on his career.

"Ah, I'm handsome," replied Whisky Bill; "but see here, Buck Halliday, who did this work on me?"

"That big Irishman down at McCormick's saloon."

"I was very drunk, wasn't I?"

"I should say as how you was, pard."

"Well, I'll show you a sick Irishman down at McCormick's before sunset. The cowardly whelp! To beat a man when he's too drunk to help himself!"

"Who do you reckon wanted to finish you when you were dead drunk?"

"Who?"

"Jim Bowles—your railroad friend."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, and I had to threaten to shoot before he would give up the notion."

"What a cowardly set they must be out here!"

"They're a hard crowd, pard."

Sore and bruised as he was, Whisky Bill dressed himself, put on his weapons, and accompanied Buck out to breakfast.

It was plainly to be seen that his prestige was gone the moment he came in contact with those who were accustomed to bow obsequiously to the bully.

But Whisky Bill said nothing about it to anyone, till after eating a hearty breakfast.

"Buck," he said, washing down the last mouthful of food with a glass of whisky, "I'm going down to McCormick's to whip that Irishman. Come along, and see the fun."

"All right, and I'll see fair play, or shoot somebody," replied Buck, rising and preparing to accompany him.

On the way down to McCormick's, many miners, who knew of the occurrences of the day before, joined them, and by the time they reached the place full half a hundred men were at his heels.

Entering the saloon, Whisky Bill walked up to the bar, and called for drinks for the crowd.

This set the current of popular feeling in his favor at once.

Paying for the drinks, Whisky Bill asked McCormick:

"Where is that Irishman of yours?"

"In the back room," replied McCormick. "Haven't you had enough of him yet?"

"Yes. I've got more than I wanted of him. I want to give some of it back."

"Good!" exclaimed McCormick. "I've got a thousand dollars to bet that you can't give it back."

"I've got a thousand to cover that bet," promptly replied

Whisky Bill, taking a wallet from his bosom, and counting out one thousand dollars, which was about all he had, and laying it on the counter. "Put up your money, and trot out your Irishman."

McCormick put up the money, both selecting Buck Halliday to act as stakeholder.

The crowd became greatly excited, and every man at once to bet his last dollar on the issue of the fight.

Jerry Malone, the burly Irishman, had been a Dublin truckman, and was a powerful fellow.

He was at least a head taller than Whisky Bill, and heavier in proportion.

"You are the brave man who pounded a drunken man yesterday, are you?" Bill asked, as Malone came into the saloon.

"Yis. I'm the b'y as kin do the loikes for the same man sober, begorra!" was the defiant reply.

"Just step outside in the back yard, then," said Whisky, "and I'll teach you another song in short order."

With a whoop and a shout Jerry made a rush for the back door, followed by the crowd, which gained fresh accessions every moment.

"Jerry!" called out McCormick, "I've put up a thousand on you."

"Begorra!" exclaimed the confident son of Erin. "I wish yez would ge after doing the same for me."

The Irishman stripped to the waist, and presented a magnificent appearance.

But Whisky Bill merely handed his weapons to Buck Halliday, and did not take off his coat.

"Pull off yer coat, pard!" cried Buck.

"I can lick him with one hand," was Bill's reply.

"Whoop!" yelled Malone. "Ould Ireland forever!" as he made a dash at his opponent.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHISKY BILL SETTLES A SCORE.

The interest excited by the proposed fight was greater than any ever created in the town by even the many deadly duels that had preceded it.

Nearly every man present was inclined to risk his money on the Irishman, because the terrible bruises on Whisky Bill's face attested the fact that he was a hard hitter.

"He's too weak to stand another one," was the universal comment.

As Malone dashed at him Whisky Bill planted a tremendous blow squarely between his eyes, which sent him reeling backwards to finally roll in the dust.

"How do you like that?" Bill quietly asked.

Malone arose to a sitting posture and gazed around, as if uncertain as to what ailed him.

"Come up and get another one!" said Bill, tauntingly. "That drunken fellow didn't have any plums like that yesterday, eh?"

With a yell Malone bounded to his feet and rushed at him as though he would demolish him at a single effort.

But Whisky Bill sent him to grass again in a twinkling, to the astonishment of even Buck Halliday himself.

Again he arose and tried to seize him around the waist; but he received a blow on the nose which forever spoiled the beauty and symmetry of that member, and he again went down.

"I'll wait for him to get up," said Whisky Bill, coolly walking about the ring formed by the crowd.

"Two to one on Whisky Bill!" cried one, who had already

put up five hundred on Jerry Malone, to the intense amusement of the crowd, but nobody took him up.

"Ten to one!" cried the same man, almost frantic at the thoughts of losing his money.

Still no takers.

"Come, get up!" cried Bill, as the Irishman was slow in coming to time. "It's a poor Irishman you are who can't hit a man once in three rounds. I don't believe you are a real Irishman, anyhow."

"Begorra, but I'm the genuine article!" cried Malone, rising and placing himself in a defensive attitude.

Whisky Bill walked up and deliberately knocked him senseless, causing him to fall like a log.

"That'll do!" cried McCormick. "I'll give up the bet."

"But I'm not done yet," said Whisky Bill. "He hasn't cried 'enough' yet, and I'll make him do it, or we'll have a funeral to-morrow."

The reply produced still greater excitement in the crowd, and murmurs of disapprobation were heard from a few of McCormick's particular friends.

Malone arose, or rather staggered to his feet, bloody as a stuck pig, and glared at his opponent.

"Look out for another!" cried Bill. "It comes from a sober man this time," and down went Jerry again, this time utterly stunned by the tremendous whack.

"This shall go no further," said McCormick, going over to his favorite and attempting to lift him up.

To his surprise, Bill seized him around the waist and sent him whirling into the crowd, knocking down some half dozen others with him.

"Keep out of this!" sternly ordered Bill, "or it will be the worse for you."

McCormick swore a great oath that he would teach him to lay his hands on him, and darted into his saloon again, as if to arm himself.

"If any man interferes in this 'ere show," cried Buck Halliday, "I'll shoot him as I would a dog."

And drawing a brace of revolvers, he stood ready to make good his words.

"Stand back!" he cried, waving the crowd back. "Give him room! This bloody Irishman beat Whisky Bill yesterday when he was dead drunk, and now he'll get some of the same sauce, or somebody else will get a bullet."

The crowd moved back and Bill turned his attention to the Irishman.

Malone was just coming to again.

Bill asked him to get up.

"Begorra, but I'm sick!" said the Irishman, in a tone that corroborated him.

"Say 'enough,' then, so we can all hear you," said Bill.

This was too much for Jerry to bear, so he leaped to his feet and showed fight again with a pluck that made him a host of friends among the spectators.

But this time Bill planted three terrific blows upon his chest, that dropped him all in a heap again at his feet.

Just then McCormick appeared at the rear door of his saloon, revolver in hand, and sung out:

"Clear the way there!"

The crowd scattered.

McCormick was known as a desperate character, and "on the shoot," so the crowd scattered immediately.

"Here, pard!" cried Buck, running forward and placing one of Bill's revolvers in his hands.

Crack! went McCormick's pistol, and a lock of hair dropped down on Whisky Bill's shoulder.

Crack! replied Bill, and McCormick dropped his weapon, staggered forward, rolling in a heap down the little stoop to the ground.

Bill's bullet had penetrated his brain, and Sam McCormick was a dead man.

"Who else wants to take it up?" demanded Whisky Bill, glaring fiercely around at the spectators. "If any man wants provocation, he can have it. I am the best man in these diggings! Who will dispute it?"

Of course no one cared to engage the terrible man who was so handy with his fists, and equally at home with the revolver.

"Tend to your Irishman, pard," cried Buck Halliday, "and I'll see to the others."

Malone was now sitting up, and trying to stop the world from spinning around with him.

"Have you got enough, thou son of Erin?" asked Bill.

"Yis, begorra!"

"Apologize, then, for striking a man when he was dead drunk, or I'll beat you to death."

"Sorry—beg yer pardon," said Malone, promptly, ready to say or do anything rather than face those fists again.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEST MAN IN THE DIGGINGS.

"Hip—hip—hurrah for Whisky Bill!" cried Buck Halliday, running forward, and clasping Bill in his arms.

Those who had won money on the fight took up the cheer, and rolled it up tremendously.

But the intimate personal friends of Sam McCormick were observed grumbling and muttering at his death, and not being allowed to go to his body.

The moment, however, that Jerry Malone cried enough, Whisky Bill turned to the crowd, and said:

"I am sorry I had to shoot McCormick, but you saw him shoot at me first. If any man says I didn't do right he'll have to whip me, that's all."

"Hurrah for Whisky Bill!" cried a still greater number, for the successful bully is the most popular man in the diggings.

They crowded around him, took him on their shoulders, and carried him around to the front of the saloon, waving their hats and proclaiming him the "whitest man in the diggings."

"Let me down, boys," he cried. "I'll stand treat for the crowd."

With a hurrah they rushed into the saloon, where McCormick's barkeeper stood at the bar, white as a sheet, but keeping his mouth shut.

"Set up the liquor for the crowd," said Bill to the bartender, "and my partner, Buck Halliday, will pay you."

Buck laid down one hundred dollars, and the crowd at once proceeded to drink it up in the vile liquor the barkeeper dealt out to them.

Seeing the barkeeper so uneasy, Bill reached over and took his hand, saying:

"I'm sorry I had to shoot your boss, but couldn't help it. I'm your friend."

The change that instantly came over the spirit of his dream was plainly visible to everyone in the saloon.

Such a large crowd could drink up one hundred dollars in a very few minutes; nor were there any men present who cared to treat to such a tune of expense; so, when he wanted another drink, Bill ordered another round for the crowd.

The miners were astonished and did their best to help him get drunk.

He treated five times in an hour, Buck Halliday paying \$100 for each treat, out of the money Bill had won from Sam McCormick.

By that time Whisky Bill was again drunk—full as a lord, and utterly regardless of consequences.

The most woe-begone and apparently friendless man in Virginia City that day was Jerry Malone, the defeated Irishman, whose eyes, in less than an hour after the fight, closed up completely.

He was taken to his quarters, and the same physician who attended Whisky Bill on the day before was called in.

Sam McCormick had a host of friends in the diggings, and hundreds clubbed together to give him an imposing funeral.

No one thought of arresting Whisky Bill, because everybody declared the killing was in self-defense; still that fact detracted nothing from the character of the deceased saloon-keeper.

Bill offered, the next day, to pay for the funeral, and would have done so cheerfully, only McCormick's friends were afraid he would want to start a private cemetery with him.

"Sam was a good fellow," said one of his friends, in speaking to another about the fight, "but he missed his man, who got the drop on him."

That was the state of society in Virginia City at the time of which we write.

On the day of the funeral every miner who could muster a red shirt and a belt, turned out and joined the procession, and assisted in doing honor to the dead saloonkeeper.

But no sooner had the grave closed over him than every man became the friend of Whisky Bill, because they thought he had done the fair thing in spending \$500 at the bar of the man he had slain.

McCormick's widow fell heiress to his estate, which was nothing but the bar and gambling tables.

That was considered a bonanza, though, in those days, as the reckless prodigality of the miners and adventurers caused a steady stream of gold and silver to pour into the till.

Benny Burton, the bartender for McCormick, at once began to assume an air of proprietorship, which was a mystery to many of the frequenters of the place until Buck Halliday succeeded in getting at the bottom facts.

He had secretly married the widow, and proceeded to run the saloon in her name—"Widow McCormick," the rough miners called her.

The fact that she was a blooming widow of thirty, rather good-looking and pleasant, caused an immense run of custom, and hundreds drank the health of "the widow" every day.

Burton conceived the idea that if she would put in an appearance behind the bar of an evening it would be a winning card, and so it proved.

Hundreds rushed in to drink from her hands, and the "Widow McCormick's" soon became the most popular resort in the town.

During all this time everybody supposed she was still the widow of McCormick.

One day the secret got out, and a general row was the result, in which Burton caught at least twenty bullets in his body, which proved to be too much lead for his health, so he laid down and died right behind the counter—literally dying in harness—at his post.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLOT.

Seeing money getting scarce with Whisky Bill and himself, Buck Halliday tried to persuade his companion to stop drinking and take a claim with him out in the diggings, but without avail.

"See here, pard," said he, one day, on catching Bill a little

more sober than usual, "we're busted an' must go out to the diggin's. This ere whisky guzzling will do very well as long as yer money holds out, and then it don't."

Bill looked up at his comrade in a half-dazed manner, as if only half comprehending the situation.

"Eh?" he said. "What's that?"

"Let's go out an' stake a claim, pard," replied Buck, good-naturedly.

"Stake a claim—work in a mine?" Bill asked.

"Yes; our money is all gone, pard, an' ef we don't work, or show the dust, we can't get no grub, you know."

"Yes, that's so," muttered Whisky Bill, reflectively, holding his hands together tightly a few moments, and then clasp- ing them over his head. "We spent all our money for liquor, didn't we?"

"Yes—over \$2,000—all for whisky," replied Buck, somewhat regretfully.

"Whisky," muttered Bill, as if thinking of the past. "Yes, whisky did it all."

"Did what, pard?"

Bill started and glanced suspiciously at his companion.

Buck Halliday returned his look inquiringly, for he suspected his comrade of having a history which he was keeping secret.

"Nothing," replied Bill, shaking his head, "except ruining me."

"Yer don't seem to be much of a ruined consarn, pard."

"So you think, friend," replied Bill, "but once I was a sober man, and had the love, respect, and confidence of friends and relatives."

"Why, what in blazes have yer done, pard? Yer haven't stole anything or killed a gal, have yer?"

"No—no! never stole a penny's worth in my life, and never hurt a baby or a girl. But I have been drunk, pard, and——"

"Drunk!" exclaimed Buck Halliday, in innocent surprise. "Why, every gentlemen gits drunk once in a while."

"That is true for this part of the world," said Bill; "but where I came from it is different. I wish I could let liquor alone, Buck. But for liquor I would not have killed McCormick, nor——"

"But he tried to kill you!"

"True; but had I been sober all the time I would not have given him occasion to try to kill me. Whisky did it all, Buck."

Buck could understand the logic, but was not subject to its influence. He had been reared in a different atmosphere, and did not see the sin of liquor drinking in the light of cause and effect.

"Waal," he said, "I wish yer would haul up an' go out with me to stake a claim somewhere. We're played out hyar, pard."

"I'll go, Buck," said Bill, after a pause of several minutes, "but I want a drink. I'm burning up with thirst."

"Don't take but one horn, pard, or yer'll be off on a big tear agin."

Bill promised to be cautious, and not drink too much, and went away, going down to the Widow Burton's saloon.

The widow was glad to see him, welcoming him with one of her blandest smiles.

"Whisky Bill," she said, as he nudged his way toward the bar, "glad to see you sober. Why don't you tap it lightly?"

The score of rough characters in the saloon at the time gave way before him as his name was pronounced by the widow.

His prestige as a man "on the shoot" was now thoroughly established, and he was feared and respected accordingly.

"How can I help it, widow?" he asked, smiling, "when to look at you makes a man as thirsty as a sandbank, and he wants to drink all your liquor in your honor?"

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed the widow. "What a splendid compliment! I say, Bill, sober up and I'll marry you!"

This proposition she leaned forward over the counter and whispered in a low tone.

"Bully for you, widow," said Bill, grasping her hand in his. "Give us a good drink on that, and——"

"But you mustn't drink any more, you know?" said she, hesitating, though looking immensely pleased.

"Just one farewell drunk, my charmer."

"Just one drink, Bill, and no more," she said, "or your life won't be worth one ounce of dust two days longer."

"What do you mean?" he asked, in some surprise, filling a glass full of whisky.

"Come into the back room," she whispered, "and I'll tell you something."

Bill drank the glass of whisky and then followed her into the little room back of the bar, where she closed the door after them.

"Bill," she said, laying a hand on his arm and looking up into his face, "do you know Jim Bowles?"

"Yes, I thrashed him once. Why?"

"Well, he and another ugly, shaggy fellow are going to kill you."

"What?"

"I heard them whispering together over their liquor last night, and they are going to watch till you get drunk again, and then pick a quarrel with and shoot you."

"But suppose I don't get drunk any more?"

"Then you can take care of yourself, and a wife, too," said she, smiling, "for you are the best man in these diggings, Bill."

"Thanks, widow, I'll not only take care of myself, but will take good care of them, too. Just wait till I settle with them, and then we'll talk about hitching teams."

Whisky Bill left the widow's saloon, and proceeded to hunt up Buck Halliday, to whom he told the widow's story.

"Better leave for the diggings with me, Bill," said Buck. "Yer may get wiped out by some of them varmints yit."

"By the beard of the prophet!" muttered Bill, staring at a man passing down the street, "if that isn't Bowles now!"

"Yes," said Buck. "That's him."

Laying a hand on his pistol, Whisky Bill turned on his heel and followed the desperado down the street.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHISKY BILL SETTLES JIM BOWLES.

"There will be a fight," muttered Buck Halliday, as he gazed after the two men. "Whisky Bill is just mad enough now to hurt somebody, and if he drinks any more to-day Jim Bowles had better get out of town in double-quick time."

Bowles went into a well-known saloon and took a seat at a small table, as if waiting for someone.

Whisky Bill entered, walked past him as though he did not see him, and went up to the bar.

The dozen men standing there greeted him with as much heartiness as if he were President of the United States, every man inviting him to have a drink of something.

"Just nominate per pisen, Bill," said a huge miner, whom Bill had met only once before.

"Thanks," said he. "I'll take a whisky straight."

"A whisky straight for Whisky Bill, barkeeper!" sung out the miner. "Everybody drink with me an' Whisky Bill! Say, stranger!" turning toward Bowles, still sitting at the little table with his hat drawn down over his eyes, as if to avoid

recognition, "come up an' wet yer whistle with me an' Whisky Bill!"

Bowles seemed greatly disturbed by the invitation, and pulled his hat further down over his face, as Bill turned around and gazed at him. He shook his head, declining the invitation.

"Oh, come up and drink like a man!" said Bill, setting his glass down on the counter, and advancing toward him.

When about half-way he was astonished to see Bowles spring up, revolver in hand, and level the weapon at his head, saying, with a dry chuckle:

"Better stop thar, Bill. I've got the drop on yer."

"What the devil have you got the drop on me for?" Bill asked, rather surprised by the sudden change in the situation.

"Hold up yer paws!" cried Bowles, determined to remain master of the situation.

Instead of doing so, Bill dodged downward and plunged forward, just as Bowles fired, the bullet crashing through a decanter on the bar.

He caught him around the waist and hurled him clear over his head up against the ceiling, letting him fall with heavy force on the floor.

The whole thing was done so quickly that Bowles scarcely knew what was the matter with him.

The fall on the floor knocked all the wind out of him, and he made no further resistance.

Bill disarmed him, and then made him get up and drink a full pint of whisky.

"That's a blessed way ter whip a fellow!" exclaimed the big miner, astonished at the scene he had witnessed.

"Oh, it's my way of heaping coals of fire on a fellow's head," said Bill. "My Sunday school teacher used to tell me when smitten on one cheek to turn the other also, and this is how I do it. Let's have another drink. Measure out another pint of your best whisky for my friend Bowles, barkeeper."

"No!" exclaimed Bowles. "I can't drink 'nother pint."

Bowles said not a word, but took the liquor and drank it off, to the surprise of the bystanders.

"Ha, ha, ha, Bowles!" chuckled Bill, as the wretch leaned over on the counter. "When I get drunk hereafter I will see that you are full first."

Bowles gave him a searching glance for a moment, and then staggered across the room to a chair, into which he dropped heavy as a log, and leaned across a table.

"I guess he's got a drunk that will last him a day or two," remarked Bill, turning to drink with his companions.

"I should say so," said another. "He'll be dead drunk for two days with all that tangle-leg in him."

Two hours passed, and Bowles remained at the table, resting his head on his arms, which were folded across each other.

At the end of that time the dark-browed, shaggy, unkempt bully whom Whisky Bill had chastised on the cars, and who had entered into the plot with Bowles, as revealed by the Widow Burton, entered the saloon and looked around, as if in search of someone.

He was looking for Bowles, whom he had agreed to meet there.

"There he is," said Whisky Bill, pointing to Bowles, with a grim smile on his face. "He was quite anxious to get me drunk, but I was too much for him—he got drunk himself. Have a drink with us?"

"No," growled the man, going toward Bowles, with an angry gleam in his eyes.

"Yes, you will!" and Bill drew a revolver. "Drink whisky or eat lead—take your choice."

"Oh, I—I'll drink with yer!" stammered the desperado,

turning quite pale and advancing to the bar, amid the chuckling of the bystanders.

"Sensible—give him a good drink, barkeeper—a pint. There's nothing mean about me."

"But I don't want to git drunk," said the shaggy bully.

"Oh, yes, you do," said Bill. "You and Bowles have been waiting to catch me drunk, so every time we meet after this you must get drunk first. Here's a good, soaking old drunk to you, old boy," and turning up his glass, Bill and the others drank ordinarily, the trembling wretch swallowing a pint of the fiery stuff.

"How was that?" Bill asked, as the man put down the pint cup and wiped his mouth.

"Good!" was the reply.

"Will that make a good drunk, do you think?"

"Yes," and the bystanders laughed at the would-be bully's truckling cowardice.

"How did you and Bowles propose to work your little game?"

The man turned a frightened face around at the speaker, and gasped:

"Eh? Watcher say?"

"You know very well what I said and what I mean. Spit it out now, or I'll make you so sick you'll want a——"

With a howl of dismay the man made a break for the door, leaping out just as a bullet from Bill's pistol sped past his ear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Whisky Bill, evidently pretty well under the influence of liquor himself. "I guess he won't try that game on me again."

"What game was it, Bill?" a dozen asked at once.

"Those two had pledged themselves to wipe me out the first time I got drunk again," he replied.

They all swore it was a mean, cowardly thing.

"By all the wildcats in Nevada, Bill!" cried an old red-shirted miner, "we'll lynch 'em ef they do, won't we, boys?"

"Yes—yes!" cried every one of the party. "We'd swing 'em up!"

"That would be some satisfaction to you fellows," said Bill, smiling, "but precious poor consolation to me. I don't propose to let 'em do it."

"Bully for you! Wipe 'em out first, eh?"

"No; but make them dead drunk first whenever we meet."

"Guess that one's gone over," remarked one of the party, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb in the direction of Bowles.

"Let's see if he is," and two of them went to him, took hold of and attempted to set him up straight in his chair.

One of them gave a start, exclaiming, as he laid a hand on his heart:

"He's dead!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SHOT BY A WOMAN.

"Dead!" exclaimed a dozen, at once, staring at each other and then at the victim.

"Yes," said the man who had made the announcement. "Dead as a herring!"

"Just as it should be," coolly remarked Whisky.

The men glared around at each other and seemed to think something was wrong with the liquor.

"We drank the same pisen," said one, in a whisper.

"Gentlemen," said the barkeeper, overhearing the remark, "that was the best whisky in Nevada, but a quart of it in two drinks within five minutes would kill the strongest man in the world."

"That's so," commented another, at which there was general relief.

"Why didn't you say so before?" demanded Whisky Bill.

"Didn't know your game," was the reply. "It's all right, though, for you say he was plotting to wipe you out. You turned the tables on him nicely. He was a cowardly dog."

"So he was," chorused the others.

"They don't play any of their games on me if I know myself," said Bill. "Give us another drink."

The party took another drink with him, and then they began to separate, till at last not one of the original party remained in the saloon.

"It's a case of dead drunk," said the barkeeper, looking at the dead man, whom they had left in the chair leaning over the table.

So it was said to be, and nothing to the contrary was known by those who were not present at the drinking.

But it was a clear case of involuntary suicide, and Whisky Bill felt, in a measure, that he was the cause of it.

The result was he drank deeper than ever during the day, winding up by a visit to the Widow Burton's saloon.

"Halloo—hic—widow!" he yelled, as he entered, reeling and staggering toward the bar. "Set 'em up—hic—for the boys!"

"Drunk again, Bill?" asked the widow, a frown of displeasure on her face.

"No—oh—I—hic—ain't drunk," replied Bill. "Give—us—hic—your best—hic—old gal."

"Not a drop," said she, firmly. "You've had enough to-day. You ought to go home and lie down."

Bill was astonished.

He had forgotten what she had said to him on the question of sobriety and marriage, and therefore didn't understand her meaning.

"Give us—hic—a drink, I say!"

"You can't get any liquor here to-day, Bill," she said, coolly. "You're drunk enough now."

With an oath he drew his revolver, and the crowd scattered, for his prestige was terrible among that lawless population.

The widow, however, turned quickly around, and taking up one of a pair of revolvers that had long laid there, wheeled and fired.

Whisky Bill threw up both hands, reeled backwards, and fell heavily on the floor.

"I am mistress here, I guess!" said Widow Burton, placing the deadly revolver back on the shelf. "He may be the best man in Nevada, but I'm the best woman, if I know myself."

The barkeeper rushed from behind the counter, and picked him up.

Blood was streaming from a hole or gash in his head.

"He's dead!" said the barkeeper.

In a few minutes the news flashed from one end of the town to the other that Widow Burton had shot and killed Whisky Bill down at her saloon.

Hundreds rushed in to learn the particulars, and nearly everyone who had witnessed the shooting was loud in his praise of the widow.

Bill was universally condemned, and one bragging bully cried out:

"I war a-goin' ter shoot him myself, when the widow popped him."

But in less than ten minutes it was ascertained that Whisky Bill's wound was simply a gash from the bullet grazing the skull and glancing off, tearing the scalp badly.

The same physician who attended him previously took charge of him again, and had him removed to his quarters.

"What—what's this, doctor?" Bill asked, on recognizing the doctor, and feeling the great pain of the wound.

"Oh, it's nothing," replied the doctor. "The widow tossed

you a bullet just now, which you were fool enough to catch on your head."

"Did it go through, doctor?"

"No; your head it too thick for that."

"Did it go inside?" he asked, so thoroughly alarmed as to be completely sobered.

"No—the same cause saved you altogether."

"Thank you. I ought to be killed for a blasted fool."

"Yes, if the foolkiller should come along you'd been in very great danger, I guess. Here, hold your head around that way till I dress this scratch," and the matter of fact man of medicine at once proceeded to bind up the wound as best he could.

He then made him go to sleep and set Buck Halliday to guard him, to prevent officious friends from interrupting him while he slept.

It was soon ascertained that his wound was by no means fatal, and those who were so loud in their denunciation of him began to tremble in their boots.

But the widow was game to the last.

"I like Bill," she said, "better than any other man when he is sober, but can't bear him when in liquor. I won't sell him liquor when he is drunk, and that's what he got mad about and drew his pistol on me for. I'd do it again under the circumstances."

The next morning Whisky Bill awoke with a very sore head, and found faithful Buck Halliday by his bedside.

"How is it, pard?" Halliday asked.

"Bad enough," was the reply. "I'm a mean, contemptible dog, Buck!"

"That's rough, pard. I wouldn't say it ef I war you."

"I—I—I'm a villain, Buck," persisted Bill.

"Oh, pshaw, pard! You're the best fellow in the world, if yer let old red-eye alone."

"I'll let it alone, Buck—I'll let it alone after this. Do you know I made Bowles drink a quart, and it killed him, yesterday?"

"The deuce!" exclaimed Buck, in great surprise.

"That's what's the matter, Buck."

"See hyar, pard!" said Buck, in great earnestness, "ef you don't stake out a better claim than whisky, Judge Lynch will have yer up before him in less'n no time!"

Bill looked at his comrade in silence for a moment or two, as if just beginning to understand the meaning of his words.

"Whisky is a bad claim to work, pard, and no mistake, which I know to my sorrow. But I ain't a temperancist—wish I war—though I don't go wild like yer do when yer get to guzzlin' it down."

"Buck," said Bill, "I'm done. I won't drink any more. It don't pay."

"See hyar, Whisky Bill," returned Buck, "don't yer go for to be a teetotaller, for I hate 'em like pisen, I do. Jes' take yer snifter when ye're dry like, but don't swill it down so strong. Go slow, pard, go slow."

"Tain't my style, Buck. I can't do it. It's drunk or sober with me."

"Better sober than drunk, then," remarked Buck, with emphasis. "Swear off an' let it alone, 'cause ef yer don't, Judge Lynch'll go for yer, or a widder or somebody else as'll wipe yer out." And Buck Halliday meant all he said.

His credit had never been tested, besides, he had no desire to run his face for anything.

"What shall we do, Buck?" he asked, after pondering long over the situation.

"Go to work," was the sententious reply.

Bill never did a day's work for pay in his life, and the thought that he must do so now was a bitter pill to him.

"Oh, what a fool I have been!" he muttered, to himself.

"Had I followed my father's advice and let liquor alone I would not have been here to-day. I had all that heart could wish—home, friends, money, indulgent parents, everything. But they are lost to me forever, all through liquor drinking. It is the Rum Fiend's frightful work. Before I began to drink I never harmed a human being, and yet, when full of liquor I have killed three men, one of whom was my friend. I am a fugitive from the place of my birth, and my name is branded as that of a murderer. What a record for a young man, only one year from college! And liquor did it all. If I don't stop right here I will commit some outrageous crime some day for which even my best friends here will help to lynch me. Yes, I'll swear off and drink no more. I'll shake hands with the Rum Fiend and keep company with him no more. I'll swear it before Buck Halliday as a witness."

When Buck returned to their quarters that day Whisky Bill recapitulated his crimes, except the killing of young Edwin Searle in Boston, and vowed that he would drink no more liquor.

"Now, pard," said Buck, shaking his head, "ye're goin' way to t'other end of the line. Moderation—yes, that's the word—moderation. Why don't yer drink in moderation?"

"Buck Halliday," said Bill, "there never was a drunkard but who was first a moderate drinker. I commenced drinking moderately, but soon became immoderate. I cannot drink now without becoming drunk and becoming a human tiger. No, I will drink no more, Buck Halliday!"

"Give us yer hand, pard!" exclaimed the honest-hearted Buck, seizing him by the hand. "I'm with yer, ready to wipe out any man who says you are not the whitest man in Nevada!"

The two men shook hands over the pledge, and then Buck proposed that they at once leave town, in order to be out of the way of temptation.

"No," said Bill, "I'll stay here a day or two longer to show them that I can keep the pledge."

Buck shook his head.

"It's dangerous, pard," he said.

"Just wait and see," replied Bill. "I'm going down to the Widow Burton's and tell her she is the gamest woman I ever saw, and congratulate her for having taught me a lesson."

"But she'll ask you to drink with her, pard."

"So she will, but I'll just spit it out—telling her how I've sworn off."

"She'll laugh at yer, pard."

"Not she. She's a good friend of mine. Only the day before she shot me she said if I would keep sober she'd marry me."

"The deuce!"

"Yes—she told me so herself."

"Why in thunder don't you sober up and marry her, then?"

"Buck," said Bill, seriously, "I've got pretty low down from what I was before I commenced hard drinking, but I don't think I am quite low enough to marry such a woman as she is. No, Buck, I'd rather go out and dig for a living, or drive mules, or do anything."

"See hyar, pard," and Buck became deeply interested. "Don't hold yer head up so high, 'cause yer ain't in New York or Boston, or any of them hifalutin' places, but way out hyar in Nevada, whar everybody does what he pleases, and don't keer a cuss whether he pleases nobody but himself. Now ef the widow had said that ter me, I'd jist smash the bottle, sober

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF.

While not dangerous, the wound he had received was a very painful one, causing him to keep his room for at least a week, during which time his money gave out entirely.

up, an' marry her, 'cause she's got the best mine in Nevada, an' women are scarce about here, anyhow. Marry her anyhow, pard," and Buck clinched the argument by bringing his fist down on the table with such force as to make it dance.

"Buck," said Bill, "I feel real sick when I think of the past. If I marry her I will have to be around the saloon all the time, and I might get to drinking again."

"Oh, pshaw pard—jist let liquor alone an' wade in. You will be the biggest man in all these diggings if you are boss of such a saloon as that."

They argued pro and con several hours, and at last he concluded he would call on the widow and see how she felt toward him since the shooting.

Dressing himself up in his best, and, by the aid of Buck placing clean bandages on his head, he proceeded down to her saloon.

She was behind the bar, waiting on several customers, assisting the barkeeper, when he entered.

"Halloo, widow," he said, with a frank, manly smile, as he advanced toward the bar. "How do you get on, eh?"

"Oh, I'm jolly," she replied, good-naturedly, "and glad to see you out again. How's your head?"

"Getting on first-rate," and, taking her hand in his, continued:

"I've come down to tell you that you did right when you shot me the other day. I was drunk and made a fool of myself. I shall never drink another drop of liquor again."

"Good for you, Bill," she exclaimed, grasping his hand with both of hers. "I am glad now that I shot you, though I was awful sorry I had to do it. You keep your word, now, and I will keep mine," and with that she threw her large, white arms around his neck and kissed him.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHISKY BILL MARRIES THE WIDOW—THE NEW NAME.

The meaning of the Widow Burton's language was well understood by our hero, though to the dozen customers who stood at the bar with glasses in their hands, it was all Greek.

He returned her kiss, saying:

"I will keep it, widow."

She seemed delighted, and at once lost all interest in the business of the bar, leaving her bartender to wait on the customers, anyone of whom would have risked his life or limb a dozen times for the sake of the kiss they had just seen her bestow on another.

They walked back into a little room at the rear of the bar, which she used as a sort of reception-room or parlor, where she placed a chair for him.

"Bill," she said, seating herself at his side, "you have made me a happy woman by what you have just told me. You are the only man I ever saw whom I thought I could love. I never really loved in my life. McCormick was kind to me, and Burton was useful and convenient. But you are just the style of man I have always admired, and I am not ashamed to tell you so."

"Widow," he said, "tell me where you came from, and what—"

"Stop, Bill," and she laid a hand on his arm as she interrupted him. "My past is a sealed secret. Don't seek to open it. It is my secret. You have yours. Keep it, and let us ignore both. I am willing to take you as I find you, and you must take me in the same way. Will you do it?"

Bill looked at the bold, daring woman, as if he would read her thoughts, wondering what could be the past that drove such a handsome woman into the wilds of the West.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "I will do it. Keep your secret, and I will respect it."

She threw her arms around his neck and covered his face with kisses.

"When shall it be, widow?" he asked.

"To-day," she replied, promptly, "and see here, Bill, don't widow me any more. Call me by my name—Kate."

"Kate—yes—that's a soft, sweet, womanly name; I like it. Kate."

"Bill?"

"You are sure you will not regret this step?"

"Yes, I am satisfied with it."

"I am a very bad man, Kate. I killed your husband."

"So you did, and made me my own mistress, for which I have been glad a number of times. But you are not a bad man at heart, Bill. It is only when you are in liquor that you are bad. If you will keep clear of liquor you will be considered the best man in Nevada."

"I will keep clear of it, Kate."

"Then come 'round here this afternoon, and we'll go before a judge and have the knot tied."

Bill left with the understanding that he was to report for duty at four o'clock that afternoon, and went in search of Buck Halliday to tell him what he had done.

"Just the thing, Bill," said Buck, grasping his hand. "You've struck it strong. Sorry to lose you for a partner, though, but it's best for you. Only one man can work that claim, yer know," and the honest, unselfish young miner smiled good-naturedly as he spoke.

In the afternoon Bill and the Widow Burton went before the justice for that district and were made man and wife.

They returned to the saloon, where Buck had collected a large party of friends to congratulate them on their marriage.

"Hurrah for the best team in Nevada!" cried an old red-shirted miner, as they entered the saloon.

"Hurrah for Whisky Bill!" cried another.

"Stop that!" cried Kate. "He is no longer Whisky Bill, for he'll never drink another drop of whisky!"

"Bully for the widow!" yelled another.

"I'll shoot the next man who dares to call me widow!" she responded. "I've the best man and husband in Nevada!"

This emphatic remark created lively enthusiasm; but one of the men asked:

"What shall we call him?"

Kate looked up at him, as if waiting for him to answer the question.

She had never known him by any other name than that of Whisky Bill.

Every eye was turned on him as he met the gaze of his wife.

He thought of his old friend, Arthur Warren, and resolved to assume his name, and, therefore, said:

"My name is William Warren—call me Bill War——"

Kate gave a start and a shriek, turning deathly pale.

"What's the matter, Kate?" he asked, staring at her.

"Nothing," she said—"nothing; but give me a glass of water."

The glass of water was handed her, and she drank it off at a gulp.

The incident created a profound impression on those who had witnessed it, but nothing was said about it in the presence of the couple.

"Hyer's good luck, long life, happiness an' heaps of children to ther bloomin' bride," said Buck Halliday.

The friends drank the toast with a hurrah, and then the bride passed into her private apartment, leaving Bill to receive the congratulations of their friends alone.

They crowded around him, all anxious to shake hands with the best man in the mines.

He was affable, pleasant and kind to all.

"Bill, yer sly old dog," said an old red-shirted miner, poking him familiarly in the ribs, "who'd a thought you war staking out a claim thar, eh?"

"She staked the claim when she shot him," remarked Buck Halliday, at which the party indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Yer won't have a drink, Bill, with an old friend, eh?" asked an acquaintance, as they all ranged themselves in front of the bar to indulge in another drink.

"No," said Bill, with a decided emphasis; "and hereafter the man is not my friend who asks me to drink."

"Beg yer pardin', Bill," said the friend. "I won't do it ag'in."

"Oh, that's all right," and Bill shook hands with him. "You didn't mean any harm, but don't do it again. You see I can't drink without making a fool of myself and killing somebody, so I want to let it alone."

"That's right—that's right," said the friend; "wish I could let it alone myself. I'd join a temperance gang if they'd come erlong jest now."

"Well, I wouldn't," said Buck Halliday, "unless I could stake such a claim as Bill did to-day, eh, pard?"

Bill smiled, and passed around among his friends, receiving their congratulations, and replying to the bantering remarks that were directed to him from all sides.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FREE FIGHT—KATE WOUNDED.

The marriage of Whisky Bill to the Widow Burton created quite a stir among the rough population of Virginia City, as the widow was regarded as the best catch in the whole region of Nevada—a regular bonanza.

In the days of which we write, a saloonkeeper in the diggings was regarded as something even above the judge on the bench, or the governor of the territory, in importance and social standing.

He dressed flashily and received tribute from every miner in the region around, for they all drank and paid liberally.

But why she turned around and married the man she had been compelled to shoot only a few days before was a mystery the rough, red-shirted fellows could not understand.

They were strangers to the caprices and whims of a wayward woman, and therefore could not understand how the thing was.

The marriage had the effect of drawing a large custom to the saloon, for people would talk about the singular match, and the best man in Nevada, which Bill was generally acknowledged to be by all who knew him.

After the marriage Bill assisted his wife in conducting the saloon, and soon became acquainted with all the details of the business.

But to his surprise, Kate was found to be a pretty hard drinker herself—not getting drunk, but keeping pretty full all the time.

"Yet she lectured me for drinking," he muttered, when thinking over it one day about two weeks after the marriage. "I'll make her sign the pledge not to drink any more, or I'll get drunk and raise a muss around here that she will not like."

One morning as they were dressing to go into the saloon, which had been kept open all night, he said:

"Kate, do you know that your drinking makes it all the harder to keep from it myself?"

"No, I did not know that," she replied.

"Well, it does. You see I smell the whiskey on your breath, and it makes me want a drink badly. If you don't let it alone

altogether I am afraid I shall get to drinking myself some day."

Kate was astonished.

"Do you mean it, Bill?" she asked.

"I don't mean, or intend to do so purposely," he replied. "I am only afraid the temptation will be too much for me."

Kate remained silent for some time and resolved that for his sake she would drink no more, and kept her resolution like a heroine.

Bill was all the happier, for it proved her affection for him was genuine, and was, therefore, more inclined to refrain from drinking.

As his wound healed he became more quiet in his manner, and appeared anything but the dangerous man he was said to be.

The thought that he had now more than ever cut himself loose from all his past, at times had a depressing effect on him.

Buck Halliday had gone to the diggings and staked a claim, which he was working in copartnership with another young fellow about his own age, and Bill saw but little of him after that.

One day there were quite a number of unruly men in the saloon, among them several old Californians who were having a big spree.

One of them stumbled over a chair and fell to the floor, and another turned the table over on him, just for a joke.

Another threw a chair on the upturned table, saying:

"That's a good lead. Follow it up——"

"Stake yer claims!" yelled another, throwing a second table on the pile.

"Hurrah for the bonanza king!" cried a fourth, seizing another table and hurling it on top of the others.

"Stop this racket!" cried Kate, rushing out of her little reception-room into the very midst of the revelers.

"What!" cried one of the Californians, striking a dramatic attitude; "do I behold a woman? An angel come down from heaven? Ha—ha! it is she—it's her!" and rushing to her side, he threw his arms around her waist, lifted her clear off the floor, and imprinted a dozen kisses on her face.

"You insolent rascal!" she cried, snatching a handful of hair from his head; "release me, or I'll kill you!"

"'Tis sweet to die by the hand of such——"

"I say, pard!" cried another Californian, rushing up, as the tables and chairs were overthrown by the man on whom they had been piled; "give us a show for that nugget!"

"Let me go, I say!" hissed Kate, her eyes flashing with indignation, seizing the man's beard and giving it a powerful wrench.

"Thunderation!" roared the man; "she's a wildcat, pard!"

Just at that moment Bill, her husband, hearing the noise, rushed from the gaming-room, and, seeing Kate struggling in the arms of two half-drunken men, darted to her assistance.

One blow, such as he could give, sent the Californian spinning across the room, and finally dropping in a heap in a corner.

The other two attempted to draw his weapons, but a blow between the eyes sent him rolling on the floor.

"Throw them outdoors, Bill," said Kate, "and whip 'em if they come back again."

No sooner had she given the order than another Californian drew his revolver, saying:

"If he touches my pard afore he gits up thar'll be a funeral in these parts, I reckon."

"Give me that pistol!" cried Kate, rushing up to the bar, pointing to the one lying on the shelf with which she had shot Bill two or three months before.

The barkeeper handed her the revolver.

"Now throw 'em out, Bill!" she said, cocking and leveling the weapon at the Californian.

Bill seized one of them as he was arising to his feet, and hurled him through the door like a rocket.

The second one followed in the same manner ere he could draw a weapon.

"Now throw this one out," said Kate.

"I'll go out," said the Californian, seeing how she had the drop on him.

"So you will—as the others did!" said Bill, knocking him down, picking him up and firing him out on top of the others.

By this time the man under the table had recovered his feet and was cursing, howling, throwing chairs about in every direction.

It did not take Bill long to hurry him out, and then he turned to accompany Kate back to her room.

The Californians were old desperadoes, and such treatment was not to be endured in silence.

They got together at the door, drew their weapons and rushed inside, resolved to clean out the place.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PLEDGE BROKEN.

As they rushed in they fired a volley toward the bar, wounding the young barkeeper who was standing behind the bar.

Kate raised her revolver and fired, and the foremost Californian reeled backwards a dead man.

Crack! went Whisky Bill's revolver, and then a regular fusilade began.

Kate emptied her revolver and then seized another behind the counter, while Bill stood up and fired in rapid succession.

The firing suddenly ceased, and three of the four Californians were down—two dead and the other wounded.

The barkeeper was badly hurt, and Kate received a flesh wound on the shoulder.

Bill escaped unhurt.

Blood flowed freely over the floor.

Hundreds rushed in as soon as the firing ceased, eager to learn the particulars.

"Who's hurt?" cried a dozen, rushing up to Bill.

"I don't know—I am not."

"I am," replied Kate.

"What! are you hit!" exclaimed Bill, catching her in his arms.

"Yes—take me to our room."

The crowd now became greatly excited.

Bill carried Kate to her room, and there ascertained that it was only a flesh wound.

He left her to place somebody in charge of the bar, and to learn the extent of the damages.

The two dead Californians were dragged to the street, and the wounded one carried to his stopping place further down the street.

No arrest followed, for in those times a free fight like that was allowed as necessary for the general good.

But the reputation of Bill and his wife spread far and wide after that, and they were looked upon as the best team in the West.

The wound threw Kate into a fever, from which she did not recover for nearly a month, during which time Bill was her constant companion and faithful nurse.

When the fever was at its highest and Bill had to sit up all night at her bedside, he felt as if he would die if he did not have a stimulant.

Without stopping to think of the consequences, he took a drink of brandy.

The fiery fluid coursed through his veins like electric flashes, and he felt like a new man.

"There!" he muttered. "That makes me feel like myself again. If I would not take too much I would be all right. I know if I can keep from it altogether, as in the past three months, I can keep from taking too much. I'll just try it, anyhow, and the first time I get drunk I'll stop again and not drink any more."

Thus reasoning up a false security he sat by the bedside of his restless, feverish wife, and drank a whole bottle of brandy, till at last, overcome by the liquor, he fell from the chair in a drunken stupor.

It was nearly daylight when our hero awoke, to find himself on the floor with a raging thirst.

He knew that water would not quench that burning, parching thirst, for he had felt it before.

It was the old fire kindled up again, and nothing but the same old thing—whisky—would satisfy it.

"Whisky—whisky," he muttered, rising to his feet and glaring around the room with bloodshot eyes. "I must have some or die."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REVELATIONS OF DELIRIUM.

In those days the famous saloons of Virginia City never closed day or night, so he had little trouble in getting as much whisky as he wanted.

Taking another hasty glance around the room, Bill darted out into an apartment that opened into the little office in the rear of the bar.

He rushed through to the bar, seized a decanter of whisky, turned it up, bottle fashion, and took a long pull at it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he put it down, "that's good whisky. I like it. What in thunder does a man want to be a teetotaller for, anyhow, when he can get such whisky as this to drink?"

"Going to try it again, boss?" the barkeeper asked, noticing the strong pull at the decanter.

"Yes—couldn't keep it—caved in," he replied, feeling considerably elevated by the big drink he had taken.

"I wouldn't go it too strong if I were you," said the bartender.

"No, I'll go slow this time. No use in a fellow dying with thirst, or drinking himself dead drunk, either."

"Yes, but some men can't tell when to put on the brakes."

"That's my case, or rather was," said Bill, "but I think I can go slow now and take just enough and then stop."

The barkeeper looked as though he doubted his self-control, but such was Whisky Bill's prestige, that he dared to insinuate nothing to that effect.

Quite a number of gamblers and miners were still at the gaming-tables absorbed in the fascinating mysteries of faro and other games, who were surprised to see him drinking again.

His terrible fight with the Californians had made him a hero with every man "on the shoot" in Nevada.

"Halloo, Bill!" cried an old miner, advancing toward him from the further end of the gambling-room. "Up early for an eye-opener, eh? Come, let's have a peep at her!"

"Well, I don't care if I do," he replied, returning to the bar with him.

Several others at once gathered around to shake hands with and congratulate him on his victory over the Californians, all of whom insisted on his drinking with them.

The result was, that by sunrise he was dangerously drunk. He went off out in the town, and remained away all through the day, leaving his wounded wife to get waited on as best she could.

"Where is Bill?" she asked, on waking up some little time after sunrise, and missing him from her side.

She was told that he had gone out into the town.

But as hour after hour passed and he did not return, she became very uneasy, and sent for the barkeeper.

"Has Bill been drinking?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Is he drunk?"

"I think he is."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, but he is out in the town somewhere."

"That will do. Send somebody to hunt him up at once."

The barkeeper soon had a couple of impecunious miners looking for him, and word was brought that he was dead drunk in a rival saloon further down the street.

This condition of affairs increased Kate's fever, and she soon became delirious, and the physician was sent for.

Bill was taken up and carried back to his own quarters, unconscious and helpless.

She grew worse, calling piteously for him in her delirium, begging him not to drink again.

The next morning he was sober again, but was consumed by a raging thirst.

The physician, who was on familiar terms with him, and withal a privileged character, said to him:

"You must not drink any more, Bill—at least, not until your wife is out of danger."

"Out of danger! Is she in danger, doctor?" he asked, in great surprise.

"Yes. When she heard yesterday that you were drunk she went clear out of her head, crying and calling for you all the time. If you don't sober up and go to her she will die!"

"Just let me have one drink to quiet my nerves, doctor," he said, "and then I'll go to her."

"One more drink will spoil it all," said the doctor, shaking his head. "Better drink some strong coffee and let the liquor alone. Just wash yourself, change your clothes, and come with me."

Thus importuned, he could not do otherwise, and in a half hour he was ready to accompany the physician into the sick room.

"Oh, Bill, my darling!" moaned poor Kate, as she tossed to and fro on the bed. "Come back to me—don't drink again. I love you so—I never loved anyone so. Don't drink any more. Bill—Bill, oh, my darling!"

Bill was touched to the heart, and, leaning over her, imprinted a kiss on her fevered lips.

"Kate, my darling," he said, "I am here. I am not drinking now."

The sound of his voice seemed to touch a chord of memory, and she turned quickly to gaze up into his face.

"Bill, have you come back to me?" she said. "I am happy now, and if you won't drink any more we will be so happy. I love you, Bill, and would die for you! You look so much like the picture of a friend of my brother Arthur, which he sent home once from college. Poor Arthur! I shall never see him again. I have lost father, mother, brother, all, and have you only to cling to, Bill. I would not be warned, but ran away, eloped with a villain, and broke their hearts. But nobody here knows me as Mary Warren, the——"

"My God!" gasped Bill, reeling back from the bedside, as if stricken a powerful blow. "It is she—it is she!"

His face was as white as the driven snow, and he glared at the flushed face of the delirious woman as at a ghost.

"What's the matter, Bill?" the physician asked, going to his side.

"Doctor!" and Bill wheeled upon the physician, grasping him with both hands, "you know me to be a desperate man, do you not?"

"Yes, Bill, you are a pretty hard nut," was the cool reply.

"Then be warned. If you dare to breathe to a living soul a syllable of what you have just seen or heard, I'll murder you in cold blood!"

"I never reveal professional secrets, sir," said he stiffly.

"See that you never reveal this, then, for on your keeping it safe hangs your life!"

The doctor had never seen him so excited, and yet so determined before, and he knew that some terrible secret existed between the two, which had just been discovered.

Kate did not stop at the interruption, but continued on in her delirious raving, speaking plaintively of her past, by which Bill became acquainted with everything, aided by a little previous knowledge!

"Doctor, can you save her?" he suddenly asked, turning to the physician.

"I don't know—perhaps I can, with your assistance," was the reply. "She was doing finely till she heard you were drinking again."

"Who told her?"

"I don't know, but she heard it from someone."

"Drunk or sober, I'll wring the neck of the one who does it again," he said, with an emphasis that startled even the doctor.

"The best plan is to keep sober," remarked the doctor, "and then all will be well. You can see how much she loves you."

Bill buried his face in his hands, and remained silent for nearly five minutes.

When he raised his head again he found himself alone with his delirious wife.

During the half hour he was with her a change had come over her.

Her eyes had a gleam of intelligence in them as she glanced up at him.

"Bill," she murmured, in weak, feeble tones.

"Kate!" and he leaned over and kissed her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEW ASPIRATIONS.

The delirium had passed away, and she was conscious again, but very, very weak.

"My darling," she muttered, feebly, "you are not drunk again, as they said you were."

"No, Kate, I am not drinking again, nor will I ever if I can help myself."

She raised her arms, and encircled his neck, and he again imprinted a kiss on her lips.

It was all the answer her overcharged heart could give.

She rapidly grew better, and during the day he remained by her bedside; but in the evening he went away by himself to exercise and think.

"By the beard of the prophet!" he exclaimed to himself. "If the world had turned around the wrong way it could not have performed a greater wonder than this. Just think of my marrying Arthur Warren's sister, away out here in Nevada, under such circumstances. I had never seen her, but one day he told me the bit of family history about her having eloped with an adventurer, and of his father having disowned her in his anger. My God, if she should write to her people, and send my picture as that of her husband! But if she should

ever become reconciled, and either go to them, or they should come to her, I'd be either hanged or imprisoned for life for having killed Edwin Searle. What shall I do? She loves me, and I like her; she has plenty of money, and I have none. Ah, liquor! whisky! how many hopes have you blasted! How many lives have you destroyed!"

The reader will remember Arthur Warren, the bosom friend of William Beckwith, mentioned in the opening chapters of our story.

Bill and the doctor kept their mouths shut as regarded the secret the wild ravings of Kate had given them, and paid her every attention during her convalescence.

One day, some two weeks after the events of the preceding chapter had occurred, Kate, who had been very sad and quiet during the day, remarked to him:

"Bill, I am tired of this kind of a life."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"I was born and bred a lady, Bill," she continued, "and this kind of life is not to my taste. I want to go back to the States and settle down to a quiet, steady life, and——"

"Leave me?" he asked, interrupting her.

"Bill!" she exclaimed, "do you for a moment think I would ever leave you? No! I will live and die by your side, Bill Warren."

"I know you would, Kate, so there is no need that you should tell me so. But why do you wish to go back to the States?"

"Because I don't like this life. There is no female society here, and then I want to remove you from the temptation to drink."

"Alas, Kate, where in all this broad land will one be removed from that temptation? It is everywhere—even further in its reach than civilization itself."

"But in some quiet, respectable country place you would not be surrounded by the same influences that surround you here. I have money enough now to make us comfortable all our lives, and we should go away from here to enjoy it. How would you like to go to Boston to live?"

He started as if stung, and gave her a searching glance.

She noticed it, and asked:

"Have you ever been in Boston, Bill?"

"Yes."

"You would like to go back there again, then?"

"No—no."

"Where, then?"

"Further west—Oregon or California," was the reply.

She looked keenly at him, and seemed saddened by the thoughts that flitted through her mind at the moment.

"Bill," she said, "I married you without even knowing your name other than Whisky Bill, because I like you—loved you—and you married me for my money—stop, don't say a word—for I know well enough that you love me now; but since we love each other now, wouldn't it be as well if we were to give each other a full history of our lives?"

"No, Kate," he said. "Keep your secret, and I will keep mine. It is foolish for one to place himself or herself in another's power. We don't know what may happen, so let the past be hidden forever from sight."

"Bill, you cannot go back with safety," she said. "I see it all now. It came of drinking whisky. I am sorry, but I will go to the ends of the earth with you; only this is the last place we should live at, for the reason that we are so well known here it would be difficult for you to cease drinking."

"I will never drink again, Kate," he said, "and you can give up this saloon, if you wish, but don't think of going east."

"Well, it shall be as you say," she replied, "but I may as well tell you my secret."

"I know it already, Mary Warren."

Kate gave a loud scream, and sprang to her feet, gazing wildly at him.

"Who are you," she cried, "that knows my maiden name?"

"I am your husband, and your secret is safe with me!" he replied.

CHAPTER XXIV.

RAISING THE CURTAIN.

"So you are my husband," she said. "But how came you by my secret? Who told it to you?"

"You did yourself," he replied.

"I told you? Impossible!"

"But you did, and in the presence of the doctor, when you were raving with fever."

"Oh, I see it all, now—I see it all, but I did not mean to do so," and she hung her head in deep thought for awhile. "I may as well tell you all now. I am the eldest daughter of Charles Warren, of Springfield, in Massachusetts. My father is both wealthy, haughty and proud. He gave me the best education that money could procure, and sent my brother, Arthur, to Harvard to graduate. I fell in love with, or at least thought I did, a handsome man by the name of Eckert, and eloped with him in spite of all opposition of parents and friends. They said he was a villain, but I would not believe them. We married, and as soon as he found that my father was inflexible, and would not forgive us, he fled with another woman to parts unknown. I obtained a divorce, married Sam McCormick, and came out here with him. You know the rest. I have never found it difficult to get a husband, for I received a dozen offers in less than a month after Sam's death. I married Burton because he was a clever fellow who would be useful to me in running the place. I have been too proud to return to my home, but now that I have made a fortune here, and have a husband I am proud of when he is sober, I am anxious to return and settle down near them again, and live there the rest of my days."

Bill knew that she had told her story straight, and was almost inclined to give her his confidence in return.

"But why place myself in another's power?" he asked himself. "We may quarrel some day and part, and then she could set the officers of the law on me. No—no, I will say nothing about it, but simply tell her something to satisfy her. Kate!"

"Well?"

"I am sure I thank you for your confidence. I did not ask you for it. Some day I may tell you my whole history, but not now. You are right when you say I am afraid to go back to the States. But it may not always be so. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes, you know what is best under the circumstances. But you will go away from here with me to some quiet place where we can live in better society than we have here, will you not?"

"Ah, yes—I will go anywhere with you, Kate."

"Then keep a good lookout for a purchaser for the saloon, and we will sell out and go away as soon as we can. And Bill!"

"What, Kate?"

"You won't drink another drop, will you?"

"No, Kate; not another drop of liquor will pass my lips."

"You make me happier than I can tell," and she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him with ardent affection.

Bill left her side and repaired to the barroom, where he told the bartender of Kate's determination to sell out the place.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the young man. "It's a bonanza to part with."

"So it is; but we are going to leave here. Let it be known the place is for sale."

The barkeeper put up a notice to that effect, and the news spread far and wide through the diggings that Whisky Bill and Fighting Kate were going to sell out and leave Nevada.

The news brought many who were anxious to invest, but she placed a big price on the saloon, and wanted all cash.

Some went away vowing they would raise the money, and others swore the price was too high; but she remained firm in her price, and would not take a cent less.

One day a party of nearly a dozen men came in from the diggings below, and began to drink and carouse pretty freely.

Among them was a young man whose beard concealed a large portion of his face.

While they were drinking, Bill came through from the little office behind the bar.

The young man dropped his glass and glared at him with staring eyes, seemingly almost speechless with astonishment.

Bill did not notice him at first, but finally his manner attracted his attention.

He looked the young man full in the face.

Something there strangely touched a chord of memory.

"Bill Beckwith!" exclaimed the young man.

"Edwin Searle!" cried Bill, springing forward and grasping his hand.

"Yes," said Edwin; "but I didn't expect to find you here."

"And I thought you dead! I've been hiding all this time."

"You came near killing me, but I got over it, and we kept the matter a secret. Your friends have no idea where you are, or why you disappeared so suddenly from home."

Bill burst into tears and clasped the young man in his arms, pressed him to his heart, and kissed him as he would have kissed a woman.

"Thank God!" he cried. "You have restored me to friends and home!"

"Have a drink with me, Bill, for old time's sake?"

"Yes, I'll drink now—ha, ha, ha! I can go back to Boston now. Fill up the glasses, barkeeper; I'll stand treat now all around."

The barkeeper filled the glasses again, shaking his head at Bill, but could not attract his attention.

Bill was too busy telling his history since coming to Nevada, and wouldn't even look at the barkeeper.

"Here's long life to you, Edwin Searle," he said, holding his glass aloft, "for you have given a new life to me, and——"

"Bill—Bill! For Heaven's sake stop!" screamed Kate, darting out through the little door that led to her rooms. "That liquor is poisoned!"

CHAPTER XXV.

EDWIN SEARLE.

The sudden appearance of Kate, and the frantic declaration that the liquor they were about to drink had been poisoned, created a panic among those who had been drinking.

Down went the glasses on the floor, and brave men, who had never feared death at the muzzle of revolver, or the point of the bowie knife, stood with blanched cheeks and glaring eyes, watching the woman.

"You told me you would not drink again, Bill," said Kate, running up and taking him by the arm, "and you must not break your pledge to me."

"The whisky!" gasped Edwin Searle, craning his neck toward her and staring her in the face, "was it poisoned?"

"No more than whisky generally is," she replied. "But it is worse than poison to my husband."

"Thank God!" burst from half a dozen at once, drawing long breaths of relief.

"Good Lord, I thought I war pisened!" exclaimed a miner. "Fill her up agin, mister."

"Fill mine, too, barkeeper," said Edwin Searle. "She frightened me perfectly sober."

"Then you had better remain so," said Kate, smiling. "I am going to see that my husband does not get drunk again."

"So you are married, eh, Bill?" asked Searle, turning and winking at his old companion.

"Yes, and have been drinking so hard since I came out here that my wife made me promise, when she caught me sober, to drink no more. You know how violent I am when in liquor."

"This is an old friend of yours, is he, Bill?" Kate asked.

"Yes, an old friend from Boston, whom I thought I had killed in a drinking spree. Mr. Edwin Searle, my wife."

They both acknowledged the introduction.

"I shall never forget you, Mrs. Beckwith," said Edwin, taking her hand in his, "for you gave me the worst scare I ever had in my life."

"Who is Mrs. Beckwith?" Kate asked, looking up at Bill, inquiringly.

"That's my name," replied Bill, sadly, "but I have disgraced it."

"No, you have not!" she cried, with startling emphasis. "Here—come in with me, both of you. Set up drinks for the crowd, Joe," and leaving the barkeeper to set out the liquor for the crowd, she led the way back to the little room from whence she had burst so suddenly on her husband and customers.

Bill and Edwin quietly followed her, and inside she turned and closed the door.

"What does all this mean, Bill?" she asked. "And tell me, once for all, who you are?"

"Well, Kate, I can do that now, but could not an hour ago. Nearly a year ago I had to fly from Boston, my home, for killing, as I believed, a friend in a bar-room fight. I've been expecting nearly every day since to see an officer in search of me, and was ready to die before going back to be tried and hanged, when who should I meet in the saloon out there but Edwin Searle, the man whom I thought I had killed. He tells me that the fight was kept secret, and no one in the city knows why I left so suddenly for parts unknown. We can now go to Boston if you wish, Kate. I am once more a free man. You can now understand why I was willing to drink with my old friend."

"Yes, I can understand it now," she replied, "and it was quite natural under the circumstances. But don't you think it best for you not to drink anything?"

"Yes, of course I do," and Bill smiled good-naturedly. "But I was so glad to see Searle alive that I was willing to go on a good drunk with him—eh, Edwin?"

"Of course; but it is as well as it is."

"A great deal better," said Kate, "for, if I understand it, you two were drinking together in Boston some time ago, when one nearly killed the other, and had to fly the country. Had you both been sober that would not have happened."

"That's so," said both men at once.

"Had I suffered you both to drink to-day you would have been drunk before night, and probably have quarreled over the old matter and got to fighting again."

"That's so," admitted both men.

"I have never known it to fail," said Kate, "and I am determined to keep my husband sober if I can. He has already killed two or three men here in his cups."

Edwin looked at him in surprise.

"That's so," said Bill, shaking his head. "The truth is I can't drink without drinking too much, and then I am ugly."

"Now tell me who you are?" Kate asked, turning to Bill.

"I am William Beckwith, the——"

Kate started as if stung.

"You were my brother's friend at college?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, we were great friends," replied Bill.

"Who is your brother?" Edwin asked, turning to Kate.

"Can you keep it a secret?" she asked.

"Yes, and will, if you desire it."

"Arthur Warren is my brother," she replied; "but for eloping with a man whom I thought I loved, my father has disowned me."

"Ah, I heard of that elopement, but never heard the man's name."

"His name was Rudolph Eckert, and——"

"Great Heavens!" gasped Edwin, springing to his feet and turning white as a sheet, and staring wildly at both Bill and Kate.

"What's the matter, Edwin?" demanded Bill.

"Do you know him?" eagerly asked Kate.

"I killed Rudolph Eckert in a drunken quarrel in New York, ten days ago," whispered Edwin, hoarsely, "which is why I am here."

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Kate, springing up and throwing her arms around Bill's neck, imprinting a kiss on his cheek. "The villain has met his doom at last."

"How did it happen?" Bill asked, as soon as Kate released him.

"We were both pretty full, and had been playing cards together. I won nearly all he had, and he became enraged, followed me out on the street, and tried to stab me. I turned on him, wrenched the dagger from him, and plunging it to the hilt in his heart, fled the city."

"You were justifiable in doing as you did," remarked Bill.

"That may be, but justice is so uncertain in New York city that I am not willing to take any chance in it."

"That's true," said Bill. "It's awful uncertain; but there is one thing that is certain, Edwin."

"What's that?"

"That whisky drinking is the road to ruin."

Edwin Searle looked out of the little window, and seemed absorbed in meditation for several minutes.

"You are right," he finally said. "It has ruined me, and several others that I know."

"I am also a victim of the rum fiend," said Bill, "some of its frightful work."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SIGNING THE PLEDGE.

That remark from Whisky Bill caused Kate to look up in surprise.

She had never before heard such strong language from him in regard to liquor drinking, and was secretly rejoiced to see him in that frame of mind.

She loved him so devoutly that she was much more than willing to forego her desire to drink, if by so doing she could keep him sober; for whenever he was under the influence of liquor she was afraid of him, but not otherwise.

"Do you really regard yourself as a victim of the rum fiend?" she asked, turning to him.

"Certainly I do. Can I control myself when drinking?"

"No. I only wish you could do that when you are sober."

"Now, what do you mean?"

"I mean that I wish you could control yourself about drinking when you are sober, and never touch another drop."

"Oh, well, I will try to do that in the future," said Bill, laughing. "But I was so overjoyed at seeing the man whose

ghost had haunted me, that I was willing to get drunk over it. But I'll never touch another drop, Kate—not another drop!"

"Nor I," said Edwin Searle, extending his hand to Bill. "I never signed a temperance pledge in my life, but I am willing to sign one now. I never thought when you and I were drinking in Boston that we were on the road to ruin, but I can see it now."

"I have seen it for some time, Edwin," remarked Bill, "but it's a harder thing to reform than you imagine."

"Oh, I can drink or let it alone, just as I please," said Edwin, confidently.

"You have never tried it, have you?"

"No."

"Well, I have."

"But you pulled through, Bill," said Kate—"didn't you?"

"Yes, but you can never tell how hard it was to do it."

"Just keep it up, and you will feel the temptation less and less every day," and then, turning to Edwin Searle, added:

"You will sign the pledge, if I write one?"

"Yes, cheerfully."

"Then I'll write one, and sign it with you."

She got pen, ink, and paper, and wrote:

"We, the undersigned, do hereby pledge ourselves not to drink anything that can intoxicate, during the term of our natural lives!"

"How will that do?" she asked.

"Read it."

She read it.

"That's a lifetime pledge," said Bill, hesitatingly.

"So it is. I hope you don't want to reserve the right to get drunk and kill somebody in the future."

"Oh, no, of course not. I'll sign it—give me the pen."

She gave him the pen, and he wrote in a bold, steady hand. "William Beckwith."

Kate snatched up the pen and wrote immediately under it: "Mary Warren Beckwith."

"Here goes for cold water and a clear head," said Edwin Searle, taking up the pen and affixing his name to the paper.

"There, now—I'll keep this as a precious document," and taking up the paper, Kate hid it in her bosom. "I am going to sell out this saloon to the first man who has money enough to buy it, and then move away. You may never go to the States again, Mr. Searle, but whether you do or not you will find that the keeping of this pledge will be your best hold anywhere in the world. I have always believed in wine-drinking until I saw my husband go down the Road to Ruin, and then I began to think. I shall never drink again."

She passed into her own apartment, leaving the two friends together, who soon went out into the town to see what was going on.

It was night ere they returned again.

Searle was looking very pale, and his hand trembled.

"Bill," he said, "you are right. It is a hard thing to do. I have been going it strong for several weeks, and to stop so suddenly will throw me completely. I am just dying for a drink now."

"Hold out faithfully, old fellow," said Bill, shaking his head. "It'll never do to go back now."

"But I'll have the jim-jams in less than an hour if I don't get something to drink," persisted Edwin, shaking like a leaf. "I tell you I must shut down gradually, and not by a sudden closing up of accounts."

"But you have signed the pledge not to drink any more."

"So I have, but I didn't know then what I do now. Come, let's go get a drink and let the thing down easy. We can go to some other saloon and get it without your wife knowing anything about it."

Bill shook his head.

Edwin turned and darted out of the saloon with the speed of a deer, leaving Bill alone.

"This won't do," muttered Bill. "I'll go after him. Maybe I can keep him straight."

He followed him up the main street into another saloon, where he found him emptying a glass of whisky.

"By George, Bill!" he said, as the latter entered, "they came near catching me that time!"

"Who did?" Bill asked.

"The monkeys. I can't cut short off that way. But you needn't say anything about it, you know."

"Of course not. But can you keep straight?"

"Yes. I'll only drink so much, and no more."

"It's dangerous," muttered Bill, as they both walked out on the street.

"Let's go out to the diggings and look around there awhile," proposed Edwin, and Bill accepted.

They went, and ever after regretted it.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HANG 'EM!—LYNCH 'EM!"

Virginia City was situated in the very midst of the Nevada diggings, so they did not have far to go to be in the midst of hundreds and thousands of red-shirted men who were delving away for the precious metal that reposed in the bosom of mother earth.

The yield of ore was remunerative, and in the work of securing it all the avarice of man's nature was aroused and on the alert.

Every man wore the inevitable leather belt with the ubiquitous revolver in full view, ready at a word to "shoot" for the most trivial offense.

It was dig—dig—dig, and shovel—shovel—shovel on every hand, and woe unto him who trespassed on another's claim. The sharp crack of a revolver settled the matter, and from its decision there was seldom any appeal, as one or the other generally yielded the point and "slept with his fathers."

Whisky Bill and Edwin Searle went out among the miners for a day of recreation—just to see what was going on.

They met several acquaintances—at least, Bill did.

"Whisky Bill!" cried a red-shirt, holding up a black bottle, "come to your namesake—embrace him!"

Bill shook his head.

"Change yer name, then—it's a fraud," and all three laughed.

"I say, Bill," said Edwin, "just a short swig won't hurt us, you know. Let's try it just once."

Bill hesitated.

He who hesitates at such a moment is lost.

He yielded, and joined the red-shirt in drinking up the contents of the bottle.

He smacked his lips with a keen relish, and said:

"It tastes better and better every time I try to shake it."

"You bet it does," said Edwin, smiling. "There's no use denying that. Why can't we tone down to it without going in so deep?"

"I don't see why we can't. Let's try it, anyhow."

They laughed and joked with the miners, drinking pretty freely with several of them.

Since his victory over the Californians, Whisky Bill had been regarded with fear and dread by nearly every miner in Nevada, hence every man among them was anxious to be considered a friend by him.

On every hand he was invited to drink, and having broken the ice by breaking his pledge, he had but little disposition to refuse.

Some had bottles of rye whisky, some corn, and others peach

brandy, cognac brandy, all of which he and Edwin drank in such mixtures and doses as would have made the tower of Babel reel and stagger.

Ere long they began to feel jolly, and sang, danced, and enjoyed themselves like lords on a spree.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bill, as a moon-eyed son of the Celestial Kingdom came by. "See the (hic) pig-tail! Cut it off!"

The Chinaman ran for dear life, for among the Caucasians he had no friends in the diggings.

The miners came to the surface in all directions to help on the race with shouts.

"Whoop! Go it, Bill!" yelled a red-headed and scarlet-shirted miner. "Hash 'im up! Slug the heathen Chineee!"

"Cut him in two!"

"Chop off his head!"

"Leave him his wooden feet!"

"Cleave him!"

"Stake yer claim!"

"I'm bettin' on yer!"

"Slay ther rat eater!"

A thousand exclamations greeted them as they flew down the hill.

Swift as he was, the Chinaman was no match for Whisky Bill in a footrace.

He was overtaken, seized by the "pig-tail," jerked violently backwards to the ground, and otherwise unceremoniously treated.

"Oh, fudgee! fudgee!" he screeched. "Lettee go, Melican man!"

"Too much pig-tail, John!" cried Bill, severing the cue close to his head.

The Chinaman yelled and cursed in choice tea-chest language—Young Hyson and Oolong—but was only laughed at by the unsympathizing miners.

"Run, John!" cried Edwin, drawing his revolver, and looking at the Mongolian.

"Holy smokee!" gasped John, on seeing the pistol. "No shootee! me go runnee all the same like Melican man!" and with that he took to his heels again, followed by a dozen straggling shots, fired merely to make him accelerate his pace.

This exploit set the miners in a good humor, and drinking became the order of the day.

Several became intoxicated, and it required but a spark to fire a volcano.

That spark was soon dropped.

A half drunken miner came up behind Bill and slapped him heavily on the back, as one friend frequently does another, and was going to ask a question, when Bill wheeled and knocked him down.

"Shoot him!" cried somebody, and it was never known whether it was meant to shoot Bill or the unfortunate miner; but Bill pulled out his weapon and commenced firing indiscriminately, wounding several and killing one outright.

Several shots were returned, and Edwin Searle drew and returned fire along with Bill.

The indignation of the miners knew no bounds.

"Kill the rascals!" they yelled, drawing their weapons and forming in a body to charge upon them.

"Lynch 'em! Hang 'em!" cried others, and hundreds came pouring out of the mines to join in the hue and cry against them.

The two crazy men had emptied their revolvers, and now drew their knives, defying the mob.

The mob made a rush and overpowered them.

"Hang 'em! Lynch 'em!" rose the cry, and they made a rush down toward the foot of the hills where trees were plentiful, carrying the doomed men along with them.

"Hang 'em—hang 'em!" and scores of men produced rope enough to hang as many hundreds in a few minutes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

The exasperated mob rushed down the hill, like an irresistible avalanche, and halted under the shade of the trees.

"Hang 'em!" cried hundreds.

"Yes—wait a while!" cried a huge, red-shirted miner, standing on a stump. "Even Judge Lynch holds a court, you know."

"Trot out yer court!" answered a voice in the crowd.

"I'm the court—trot out your witnesses!" replied burly red-shirt.

"I'm a witness with a bullet in my shoulder," said a man, coming forward with his whole left side covered with blood.

"He shot me without cause. I say hang 'em both."

"I'm another. I've a bullet in my thigh."

"See my broken arm!" cried a third.

"A piece of my ear is gone!" said an old gray-bearded miner, holding a revolver in his hand, "and if yer don't swing 'em up, I'm going to blow a hole right through 'em both."

A wild yell of approbation burst from the hundreds of rough men around them.

"Whisky Bill has killed enough men about here!" cried a voice in the crowd.

The terrible situation had the effect to completely sober the two men, and they turned pale as death at the peril that menaced them.

Witness after witness appeared against them, and the feeling was almost unanimous for lynching them.

Suddenly a red-shirted miner burst through the crowd and confronted the judge and the bleeding witnesses.

It was Buck Halliday.

"See hyar, jedge," he cried, "yer don't give t'other side no show. Now, I'm a witness for t'other side, 'cause Whisky Bill was my pard onct, an' Buck Halliday is a man what never goes back on a friend. Whisky Bill, when sober, is the whitest man in Nevada, an' I'm the man that can lick the galoot who says it ain't good gospel. Who is it that ain't a blasted fool when he's drunk? I told my pard he'd fetch up in this 'ere court some day if he didn't let liquor alone, and he tried to let it alone; but he didn't, much. He is the best man sober in these diggin's, and when he's drunk he's the worst to manage. Don't hang a man for what whisky does, but send him off—banish him, an' tell him up he goes if he comes back agin. Ef he was a bad man sober, I'd say hang him; but Bill ain't, an' that's what's the matter with me!"

During the delivery of this speech the crowd listened attentively, for they all knew and respected Buck.

Many were in favor of his views, but a majority still cried out to "hang both of 'em!"

"Hang 'em—hang 'em!"

The judge nodded and pointed toward Edwin Searle.

Three men seized and tied his hands, and placed a rope around his neck.

"This is horrible!" exclaimed Edwin, turning to Bill.

"Terrible!" said Bill. "We have traveled the road to ruin, Edwin. Had we kept the pledge, this would not have been."

"Gentlemen," cried Edwin, in a loud voice, "in every part of the world a man is given a hearing before he is condemned."

"Yes, but yer didn't wait to hear us," cried one of the wounded witnesses.

"I was drunk, and you helped to make me drunk by offering me whisky, and now——"

"String him up!" cried a voice in the crowd, and he was run up without being allowed to say another word in his defense.

He writhed and struggled a few minutes, and then all was still.

Whisky Bill looked on with horror depicted in every feature as his old friend writhed in his death throes.

He stood like one turned to stone, and Buck Halliday whispered:

"I did my best, pard, but it was no go. I war afraid of this all along, but yer wouldn't let liquor alone."

"You are a true friend, Buck," said Bill. "The fault was all my own. I couldn't get off this road to ruin. The Rum Fiend led me on."

Suddenly there was a commotion on the outer edge of the crowd, and men began to give way before something, which, had it been a wild beast—a tiger or a lion—they could not have given way more promptly, and a moment later, Kate, the wife of Whisky Bill, burst into the ring where he was held a prisoner, with eyes flashing and a revolver in each hand.

"Hands off!" she cried fiercely, aiming at the heads of the two men who held him, "or you are dead men!"

They let go and sprang back as if from the presence of death itself.

"Hurrah for brave Kate!" yelled Buck Halliday, darting to her side with his seven-shooter. "There'll be more than one man wiped out here before you hang my old pard."

"Here, Bill," said Kate, handing him a revolver. "Sell out at the highest price you can get."

A roar of dissatisfaction greeted her actions, for there were men in that crowd who wanted to get rid of Bill.

"Men of Virginia City!" cried Kate, in strong, determined tones, "you must kill me before you can lynch Whisky Bill. We are a strong team together, and somebody will be wiped out, or I have forgotten how to shoot."

"We know how to shoot, too," said a voice in the crowd.

"I'll bet a thousand dollars that you don't!" she retorted. "So come out or shut up!"

That had the effect to cause interruptions to cease.

"Now, look here, men," she continued, "I made Bill and that poor fellow up there," pointing to the dead body of Edwin Searle swinging to the limb, "sign a pledge this very day that they would never drink any more liquor. Here it is," and she took out the pledge and read it aloud, so that all could hear. "We all three signed it; and those two men came out here and yielded to the solicitations of some of you, drank your liquor, got drunk, and now this is the result. In a few days I was going to sell out and go away where my husband would be free from temptation, but you made him drunk, and now, by the grace of God, I'll kill the man who lays a hand on him!"

Her words produced a profound impression upon those rough men, many of whom stole away and would take no hand in any of the proceedings.

The burly, red-headed judge asked for the pledge and looked at it carefully.

"It's jest as she says, boys," he remarked, as he glanced at the names at the bottom of it.

"Of course it is," said Buck Halliday. "She wouldn't tell a lie."

"How long before yer can leave these diggins?" the judge asked of Kate.

"A week."

"Then, ef he ain't gone in a week, we'll hang him—eh, men?"

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

"That was a close shave, pard!" said Buck Halliday, turning and grasping Bill's hand.

"Yes," replied Bill, still white as a sheet. "I was never so near death before. You have saved my life, Kate."

"Yes," she replied. "But had you kept that pledge this would never have happened. Why did you drink, Bill?"

Bill explained.

"We must leave here in a week or there'll be trouble. While we remain here you shall not leave my sight under any circumstances."

"Guess he'd better go at once," suggested Buck.

"Not unless I go, too," she replied.

"Then yer both had better go, 'cause there'll be trouble ef yer don't."

"How do you know that?"

"'Cause they are talking about burning down yer saloon an' killin' all of yer in the night."

"Then we'll go at once, Buck," and Kate looked him straight in the eye as she spoke. "I'll leave you in charge of the saloon and give you power to sell out for me. I'll trust you, for I believe you are honest."

Buck agreed to accept the trust, and all three went back together to the saloon.

Kate told the barkeeper that Buck had bought the saloon, and that she and Bill would leave town at once.

They took all their baggage and money, and took the stage for the nearest roadpoint.

Arrived in Chicago they went to a first-class hotel, where they put up, and proceeded to order a wardrobe for each.

In the meantime he sat down, and wrote to his father that he was married, and was on his way home with his wife.

After getting a full wardrobe of fashionable clothing they started east, and in due time arrived in Boston.

"There he is!" cried Alice Beckwith, his favorite sister, who sprang into his arms the moment he left the car. "Oh, brother, we thought you were dead!"

"I am the liveliest man with the liveliest wife in the world, Alice. This is my wife, Mary."

The two women hugged and kissed each other, and felt as if they could love each other always.

Eleanor received him cordially, but with her old stately dignity, and the father and mother received him only as a dearly beloved son could be received.

"My dear boy!" exclaimed the man, with a hearty shake of the hand, "you have grown as brown as a berry. Tell me where you have been, and I'll forgive you everything."

"I have been out west in the mines, father."

"The deuce you have! Why did you not let us know something about it before you left?"

"Oh, I wanted to make a sensation and a fortune at the same time," was the laughing reply.

"Did you make the fortune?"

"Yes."

"Good!" and his father grasped his hand heartily again.

"Do you drink anything?"

"Never!"

"Good again. I like your wife. She looks like a sensible woman. You are going to remain with us?"

"Yes—we are going to settle down in Boston."

William Beckwith was welcomed by his old friends with a hearty hurrah, and they wanted to drink his health with him.

"No, fellows," he would say. "I never drink anything. I smoke, that's all."

One day Alice received a letter, and her bright young face beamed with happiness as she read it.

"Out with it, Al," said William. "I think I know the handwriting on that envelope. Have you ratified my bargain with Ludlow?"

Alice blushed scarlet and fled out of the room.

Ludlow had written that he was coming to see her on the morrow.

He came, and was thunderstruck to find his old classmate and chum at home with a wife.

"To-morrow we have our annual dinner, you know, when Warren and Joe and the others will be on hand."

"I had forgotten all about it. I never drink anything now."

"Well, you'll have to drink then, or break your pledge."

"I shall break the pledge, then," said he, firmly.

"Are you in earnest, William?"

"Never more so in my life."

"That'll make them open their eyes. They all think you have been mysteriously murdered."

In the private parlor of one of the largest hotels in Boston, a party of seven young men, all graduates of Harvard, sat down to a banquet.

"Gentlemen," said Arthur Warren, who presided, "remember your pledge, made one year ago this day. Fill up your glasses, and drink to the——"

"Hold on, Mr. Chairman," interrupted William Beckwith arising to his feet. "I have something to say why we should forget, instead of remembering, that pledge, provided you will pledge me your honor as gentlemen to keep forever secret what is said. Do you promise me that much?"

"We do," the six responded.

"Well, then, that pledge was the gate to the road to ruin. I followed it, and in a drunken brawl came so near killing a friend in this city that, thinking him dead, I fled and hid away in the far west till he, for a similar cause, came out there and relieved my suspense. He and I were so glad to see each other that we got drunk, and raised such a rumpus—killing and wounding several miners—that a mob seized us, hung him, and were about to string me up when my wife, with a brace of seven-shooters, interfered, and defeated them. Since that day I have never touched a drop of strong drink, and never will again."

"Spoken like a man!" exclaimed Warren, "and yet it sounds like a romance."

"I have been in a terrible reality. There was no romance about it. This wine drinking leads to death. I have seen the Rum Fiend's frightful work."

"Let's take the pledge and leave the wine out," suggested Ludlow.

"Good—good!" cried the others, and the pledge of total abstinence was taken then and there.

That evening William Beckwith received his classmates at his father's residence.

The meeting of Arthur Warren with his sister Mary, married to his friend, instead of being in disgrace, was a joyful surprise, and a perfect reconciliation with all her people followed.

The annual class dinner is still in vogue, but no wine is ever found on the table, for they remember the terrible story of Whisky Bill, and the Rum Fiend's terrible work.

THE END.

Read "UP FROM THE RANKS; or, FROM CORPORAL TO GENERAL," a story of the Great Rebellion, by Gen. Jas. A. Gordon, which will be the next number (307) of "Pluck and Luck."

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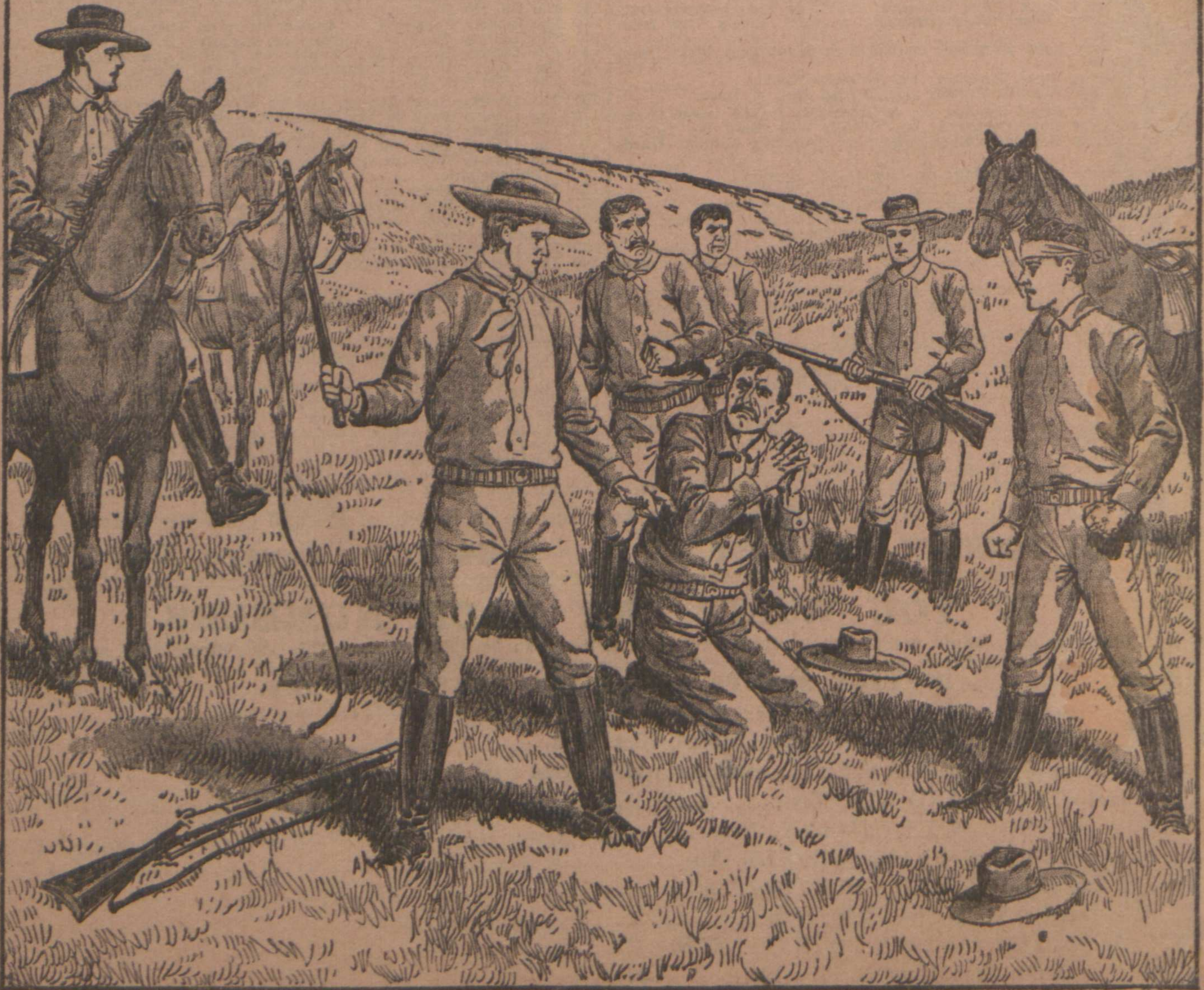
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